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BRUNEL'S TOWER



BRUNEL'S TOWER

BY

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

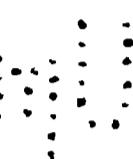
AUTHOR OF "THE THREE BROTHERS", "FAITH TRELION" ETC.

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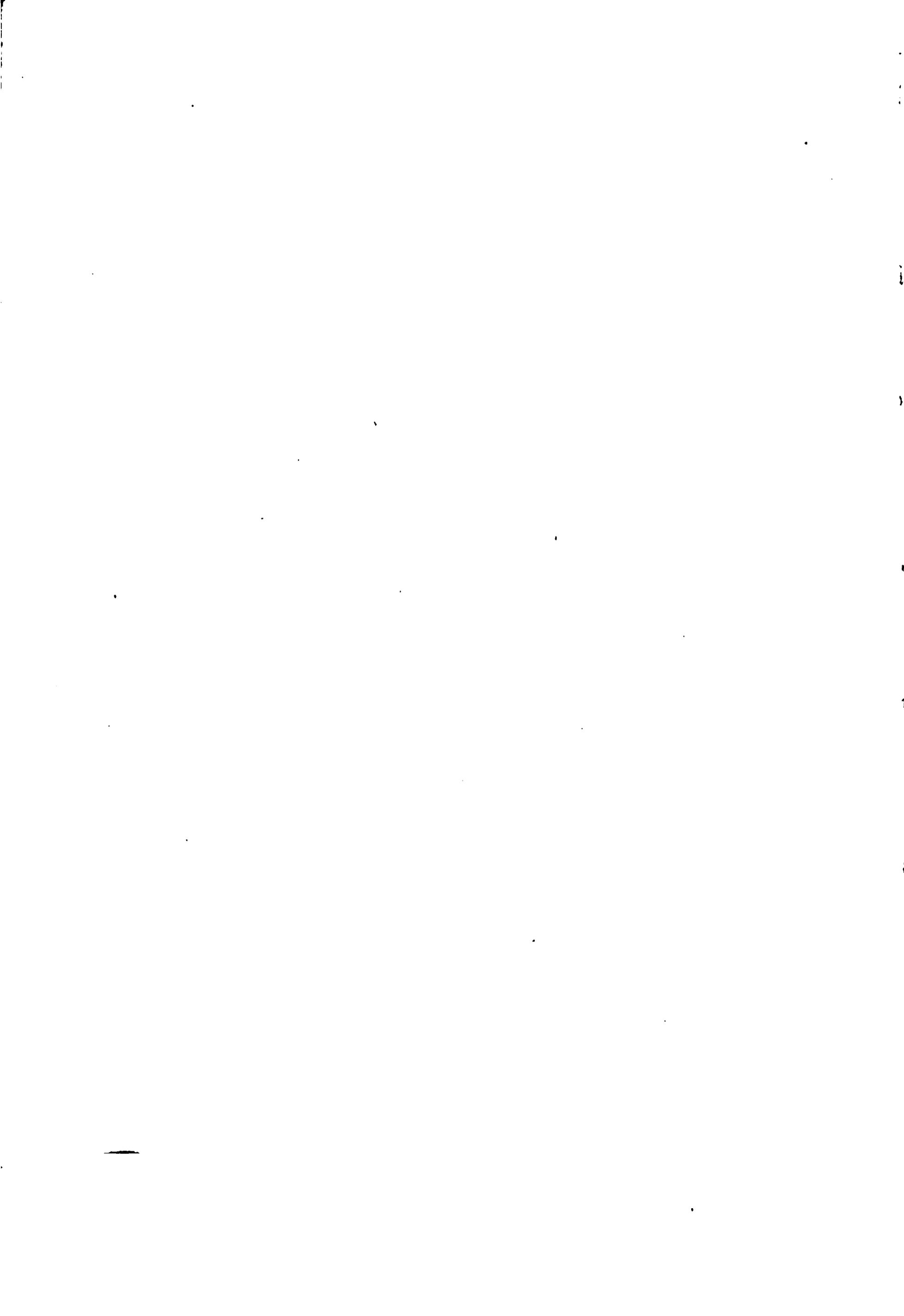
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BOOK I



BRUNEL'S TOWER

CHAPTER I

THE RUIN BY THE ROAD

THERE is a road of the West-Country that leads from Newton Abbot to Tor Bay, and along it there once walked a young man. At first glance he had been pronounced no wanderer, for determination guided his footsteps, and he proceeded as though familiar with his way and the goal of it; yet it appeared that he was a stranger, for the land to right and left of him arrested his attention curiously. Sometimes he would enter a field to examine the nature of the soil that it contained; and presently he stopped altogether at a gate whence wound a road to a congeries of low buildings.

He carried a bundle on a thick stick, and was clad in rough grey cloth with a "deer-stalker" hat. He had been six feet high but for a slight stoop. His face was bearded and the mouth concealed, though it needed not his lips to proclaim the man. His eyes were blue and steady, his nose broad in the nostril, clean-cut and large. A slight frown marked the face, for the eyebrows were set low, but the expression imparted by them was

accidental and did not belong to character. The man's heart seldom frowned. He was of sanguine complexion, and had fair, close-cropped hair. Something more than singleness of purpose marked his face. Imagination belonged to it, and though the curl of his mouth could not be seen, a quality of mind akin to the artist's appeared in his brow—high rather than broad—and in his hands. They were strong and wiry, but thin—with long fingers and somewhat square nails. They suggested music, and indeed were calloused, but not with strings. A corn, that had puzzled the unknowing, ran along the under side of his little finger on either hand.

Power, reticence, and the confidence of youth marked this man, and, indeed, more than the consciousness of his own skill set his foot firm. In his pocket were a hundred pounds and generous credentials. He had left friends that he might enlarge his borders and improve his position. He had come to the West to find work worthy of his hands, and a position of greater promise and power than life had yet offered. His masters had approved his ambition and were glad for him to go, yet very willing to take him back if he desired presently to return.

Neither encumbrances nor relatives belonged to him: indeed, he knew of no relations save his dead mother's sister—a woman earning her own living.

Now he stood with his eyes fixed on a cluster of low buildings surmounted by familiar cones. Here spread a potter's field and stood potting-works in a little vale. He marked where the clay pits opened close at hand, and saw men, like red

beetles, moving here and there with barrows. The ruddy earth interested him, for it was unfamiliar. Green fields rolled round about; above them towered the edges of a wood whence came cooing of doves, while beyond the buildings a stream ran where spread water-meadows bright with kingcups and the swords of the yellow iris. Kine grazed here—red as the red earth of the land; and far off, sunk low to the west, limestone cliffs ascended and towered in many a crag above a quarry.

It was now the dinner-hour, and the traveller joined a dozen men who sat in the sun and ate their meat outside the pot-works. They offered no hope of employment, and showed a heavy indifference to fortune and extreme lack of interest in their toil. To the Midlander, their long-drawn, leisurely speech, apparent inertia, and total absence of imagination came as a surprise. It seemed that their brains were turned to clay by their work. He surveyed the stolid company with a contempt scarcely concealed, but stayed long enough to learn of other potteries at hand.

Then he left them with an abrupt good-day. They wished him well—a fact that astonished him, for he had not guessed that any spirit of kindness to a stranger hid in such lumbering souls.

“Thank you,” he said. “Maybe you’ll see me again; I might interest your master more than I interest you.”

He proceeded through Kingskerswell to The Half-Way House, and stayed at that inn to drink a glass of beer and eat some bread and cheese.

Walking onward, he crossed a railway-bridge, climbed a little hill, and found himself approaching his destination. Then that happened to change his life from the top to the bottom, exalt his ambitions mightily, and render his present intentions mean in the light of a sudden and splendid inspiration.

George Easterbrook, marking a deserted ruin upon his left, had proceeded to it in a simple spirit of inquiry. A rough track led thereto from the thoroughfare, and a dozen fir-trees rose on either side. Then appeared a place that puzzled the traveller, for he had seen nothing like it before. There gaped a great vaulted chamber, with shattered roof of slate supported by solid stone walls, while above it ascended what he took to be a chimney-stack, yet never had he remarked one finished with so great a regard for form and beauty. It resembled the picture of an Italian campanile that Easterbrook had seen in a journal. It was square, and built of grey limestone; but masses of red conglomerate sandstone were wrought into the top of the shaft, and red tiles protruded in a deep eave round the summit.

The place and its problems awoke lively interest in the stranger who now explored it. He investigated the ruin on every side, and then, startled by the sudden thunder of a train, discovered that a cutting of the Great Western Railway ran immediately behind these dismantled works. Easterbrook's personal purposes were forgotten entirely during this investigation; but now the forlorn spot became alive to him, and grew suddenly pregnant with startling promise. He

ceased to concern himself with what it had been, and reflected on what it might be. He saw it restored for no doubtful purpose; he imagined success visiting these haggard walls. It seemed that the neglected thing was sentient, and implored him to come to the rescue, before time levelled its stones to the earth and not one remained standing upon another.

But the explorer was no visionary. The practical stood ever at his elbow to shorten his dreams. Convinced that here might lie the possible theatre of a prosperous enterprise, his reason began to offer a dozen objections. He did not permit them to kill his inspiration, but he denied none its true value. First arose the question of acquiring the ruin at all, and since that could not be determined until the morrow, he wasted no time upon the other obstacles. Only in one further direction did he expend energy, and since to bring clay from afar was beyond his power, he now considered the soil. He tramped the surrounding land within a radius of two hundred yards and found what he desired. Here was a common, heavy, red earth—probably too unctuous for his needs and foretelling extreme shrinkage under fire; but close at hand; disposed by potter's providence within fifty yards of the prevailing clay, there ran a stratum of "shorter" material, obviously more stiff and less pervious to water. It was geologically younger than the other, and contained sandy constituents which made it a right complement to the older stuff. Experiment alone could decide the relative value of these materials, and the stranger was not yet familiar with the behaviour of red

earth in the oven; but that the staple was true potter's clay he knew, and that it might be capable of immense improvement he guessed.

This paramount consideration granted, he had leisure to consider others scarcely less vital. He washed his hands in a rill that ran beside the ruin, again walked slowly round the ivy-mantled tower, and again stood in the great dark chamber beneath it. Then, having spent six hours on the spot, he set out briskly through the dusk of an April night to Torquay. His plans were in suspense, his original determination to seek work was thrust to the back of his mind until this great matter should be examined and settled. He bought some supper, and found where he might get a bed and breakfast for one shilling.

At six o'clock next morning he rose, joined the folk of the lodging, and took his meal with them. They knew the tower, and associated it with the railway. To the offices of the railway he therefore went, and was referred to headquarters. Incidentally he learned the original object of the empty works, and felt acute, if transitory, interest in that vanished enterprise, for the life and achievements of the creator were known to Easterbrook.

Here stood one of those air-power stations established some sixty years ago, when it was hoped that traction might be usefully developed by the introduction of an atmospheric pressure system. By the creation of a vacuum in a pipe laid along the permanent way and the exhaustion of air in front of a piston, a new motive power for England was established—a system of “harnessing”

the air first employed two hundred years earlier in France. Tests of a satisfactory character were made in various parts of the United Kingdom, and Brunel, impressed with its possibilities, advised the directors of the South Devon Railway to experiment. He himself designed the line, now part of the Great Western Railway, with a special view to the requirements of the system, and air-pumping houses were erected at intervals of three or four miles. Of these Easterbrook's ruin was one. Other towers still stand at Starcross and Totnes. During the year 1847 the trains began to run by atmospheric pressure, and at first good speeds were attained and all went well; but in course of time fatal difficulties in connection with the valves appeared, and the experiment was abandoned.

Now the newcomer tramped the town, studied very carefully the local ware exhibited, and presently called at certain potteries, whence the pieces came.

He made no mention of his business, and was shown round the works like an ordinary visitor; but he asked a thousand questions and saw enough to satisfy him that these enterprises were unimportant.

That night, pending an answer from Paddington, he wrote two very lengthy letters—one to his former employers, and one to his only friend.

In many respects these communications were identical, but in some they differed. To his old masters he unfolded his scheme; explained the market that appeared to await him; declared his confidence that he could cut a better pot from the

wheel than any he had yet seen of Devonshire make; dwelt upon the nature of the ruin that he had discovered; and described in immense but most lucid detail the character of the place and the ease with which one or more kilns might be built into the existing chimney-stack. He calculated the cost of such a kiln and the necessary outlay of commencing potter. He asserted that for about two hundred pounds he could begin to market pottery, and left spaces in his letter which it would be impossible to fill up before he had made further inquiries. Such a communication would not have tempted many employers, but those for whom he had worked knew him, and when they had read his letter presently, they judged the prospects must be extraordinary to tempt George Easterbrook to such enthusiasm.

He did not send the communication until he learned that the Railway Company was prepared to lease the ruin at a moderate rental, and that the adjacent landowners would make no difficulty concerning the clay. Then he asked his former masters to lend him three hundred pounds and fix the rate of interest themselves. Glad to assist the man and very sure of him, they consented; and with their response there came a letter from his friend.

Paul Pitts was his name, Easterbrook's junior by two years and a man of genius in the elder's opinion. He modelled clay and decorated china, or earthenware with original designs. To Pitts, a bashful and retiring spirit, George Easterbrook was more than a friend. He held the potter in almost reverend esteem, declared and believed

that no such masterful man and skilful thrower had ever been lost to the Potteries, and regarded the goodwill of the elder as his most cherished possession.

When therefore Easterbrook made the startling announcement that he designed to tempt fortune with works of his own, Paul Pitts, doubting nothing, agreed to join him and share what fortune might lie ahead.

Preparations moved swiftly and surely. The potter took a lodgings at Long Park, a hamlet near what he now called "the works," and spent a week in mastering the conditions of local labour and the terms upon which it proceeded. He found the men underpaid and stupid, the masters shortsighted and without enterprise.

A large brick-kiln stood a mile from Brunel's Tower, and hither he took his clays and had some bakings at low temperature. He varied the component parts of the fat and thin clays, and presently convinced himself that the proportions were two-thirds of the former to a third of the latter. The supply of both was inexhaustible, and the terms on which they might be worked easy enough.

The lease of the ruin was signed within eight days of his first visit, and it embraced a clause under which he might purchase, if he chose to do so. In a month two wheels and a lathe were placed, an oven built, and the plant for preparing the clay set up. Paul Pitts arrived, took a room at Long Park, and began to experiment with the clay. He declared it pleasant, silky stuff, and capable of delicate manipulation.

Two other men and a boy were engaged. Of these men one was the master of Easterbrook's lodging, the fireman of a small local pottery, who came to him for an addition of half-a-crown a week to his wages. He was called Samuel Punchard; and the second man—a painter—was named Foster Coysh. The boy's name was William Greenslade, and he came from the brick-works.

A master potter or two called on Easterbrook at his tower and wished him good fortune and foretold bad. They were friendly and kindly—very willing to serve him and contribute to his convenience. They showed no inclination to dread his competition, and warned him that the local terra-cotta was not adapted to delicate or distinguished work. Their chief surprise centred in the fact that none had ever thought of turning the ruin into a pottery; its suitability was so obvious.

In six weeks from his discovery of the ruin, Easterbrook threw clay, turned pots, and fired them. The draught of Brunel's Tower was superb, and the kiln worked well. Foster Coysh decorated with simple slip made from red clay and white; Paul Pitts, who had brought original designs for decorations with him, was busy in the preparation of plaster-of-Paris moulds for his future needs.

In two months Easterbrook took his first samples to market. They were typical of the man, and displayed clean lines, simple and direct patterns, and bright, hard glazing. Some shook their heads at the severity of the earthenware; some, more discerning, compared it favourably with the

more gaudy and more ornate local pottery formed of like material.

He obtained small orders from two-and-forty retail houses in the neighbourhood, always accompanied by the strict stipulation that his work must be as good as the samples.

While he fulfilled his commissions of the simpler pieces first submitted, Easterbrook worked with Pitts at more important and distinguished ware destined to lift the "Brunel" faience to fame. For "Brunel" was the name he chose, and as a mark he set upon the bottom of every important pot a few rough scratches that represented his chimney-stack. He also wrote his own name in the clay if a piece pleased him.

CHAPTER II

EASTERBROOK AND PITTS

THE character of George Easterbrook was tried in the furnace of prosperity, and sustained good fortune left its mark upon him. He succeeded above his own expectations, and while the remarkable results of the first ten years were not increased in the same ratio, he none the less e~~st~~lished a prosperous and lucrative business was born of sleepless labour and based on a populous probity.

Within ten years he employed forty men boys, and had built about Brunel's Tower a v equipped little pottery of four kilns.

He threw on the wheel once a week for P Pitts, and their best pieces were valuable. Tl had been exhibited at important Expositions in England and America, and had won for the Brunel pottery a handsome case of silver and bronze medals, with one of gold.

But upon a huge output of minor crockery the financial success of the works depended. These things, from a toy for a penny to a teapot at a shilling, were produced daily by the thousand, and sent to all parts of England, to Canada, and the Cape. The demand and the supply were alike increasing.

George Easterbrook was his own traveller, and

had many friends. His character may be summed up in a word: it was aristocratic, and embraced the virtues and errors therein implied.

Consciousness of power was apparent in the glance of the man; physically he never permitted himself to show weariness; mentally he was impatient of any attitude to be described as shirking or slovenly. He despised the general desire for comfort as weakness, and it was a saying with him that people would have plenty of time to be comfortable in their graves. He was really noble, but he liked to suggest his exceptional characteristics by an imposing attitude, and slow, restrained, and level speech. None had seen him out of temper or angry to the eye. He was strict, and hesitated not to reprove; but he was just, and the serenity of manner that accompanied his severe criticisms made them harder to endure than had they been leavened with human annoyance and a flash of heat.

His own work was wrought in the grand manner, so far as the medium permitted. He charged stiff prices for it and obtained them. But it began to diminish a little in value, for he had flooded the market, and now he reduced his personal activities at the wheel and poured them into the administrative side of his business.

He confessed to ignorance of many things, but prided himself on a very subtle and peculiar knowledge of human nature, and acknowledged no errors in his judgment of men. He read for instruction along certain lines, and enjoyed philosophy, but found religion not necessary to his nature. His opinions promised danger in some di-

rections, for he held with doubtful soundness that environment and education will tincture the blood in a man's veins and turn the sour sweet, or the sweet sour. His life-long friend withstood him in this opinion. Paul Pitts, drawing a simile from the craft, declared that no process would turn earthenware into china, or reduce china clay to earth; but Easterbrook held the parallel unfair, and believed little in heredity, much in circumstance and the accidents of fortune. He was an agnostic, but never obtruded his personal views and preserved a respectful attitude to all forms of religious belief and observance.

In some sort he proved a touchstone to men, and those who struck against him were apt to sound their true note, sometimes unconsciously. This accident of his own quality helped Easterbrook in his honest conviction that he could not be deceived; nor did fate concern itself to open his eyes, for those he gathered about him were honourable and reasonable men, of no great force of character or originality of mind. He had the art to win enthusiastic service, for he was kindly and considerate. He made no such heavy demands upon his staff as he made upon himself. He was, moreover, generous, and helped to encourage thrift by contributing to the men's funds. They liked him well, and some, who did more than like him, would have sacrificed their welfare for his had such renunciation been needed.

At the age of thirty-five Easterbrook married, and lost his wife in child-bed. His great desire and longing was a son, and a son was born only to die.

Seven years later he wedded again. But once more ill fortune attended him, and his married life was brief. In three years his second wife died of malignant disease, and left him a widower, with one daughter.

He lamented the lack of a son, but did not seek another partner, and brought up his girl to paint in the pottery. She enjoyed the work, and soon became expert at it. But time failed to develop her powers. She was efficient, yet made no progress to the super-excellence that he had hoped would appear. Environment cannot breed talent; but the discovery rather surprised him.

Only two women worked at Brunel's Tower. In addition to his daughter, Joanna, Easterbrook's aunt, Sophia Medway, a flower-painter, had joined him at an early stage of his enterprise. As a capable woman of forty she came, and now she was old and still painted flowers on the cheap ware. The work was her life, and she fought blindness and strove to put the approaching end of her labours from her mind.

Paul Pitts remained a bachelor, and was constitutionally unfitted for marriage; but his work continued of notable quality and he had made many successful models in the course of thirty years.

This, then, was the situation that forewent the incidents to be chronicled. George Easterbrook was sixty years of age and his daughter seventeen, while Paul Pitts numbered eight-and-fifty years and Sophia Medway was seventy. They all dwelt together, in a house situate half a mile from the pottery. The large garden of it was an interest to the men. But while Paul grew flowers

and cultivated certain lilies and irises for their form and the interesting seed-cases they produced, George was more attracted to fruit and vegetables, and prided himself on his pears.

The staff of the pottery lived round about, some walking and not a few bicycling to their work. There was a spirit of peace and good-fellowship in the place; disaffection had been unknown from the beginning, and discontent was rare.

The title of the firm embraced the names of the two partners. It was known through the United Kingdom, in Canada, in Australia, and at the Cape, as "Easterbrook and Pitts."

No shadow of difference had ever clouded the lifelong friendship of these men. They saw with like vision on nearly every subject; they admired each other profoundly; and Paul attributed his success entirely to his friend. It may also be said of them that each loved his craft far better than the prosperity that it had brought to both.

CHAPTER III

THE RUNAWAY

A TALL, thin boy was stealing turnips, and chance sending a man to look over a gate, that accident determined the whole future life of the turnip-stealer, and opened the way to preliminary passages therein of an exciting nature. Others, indeed, no less exciting, were already behind the boy. Certain crowded and glorious hours still remained very vividly in his memory; but he had hoped that for a season at least life promised to run in easier channels, and when the man at the gate climbed over it, hailed him as a "damned rogue," and hastened towards him, the boy bolted, with the bored air of a fox, who thinks that he has thrown off the hounds and yet again hears them baying on his tracks. He had run far, but now he had to run once more. He wore grey trousers, well caked with mud, that had taken a gloss where the legs of them rubbed together. A leathern belt held them up; and for the rest he was clad in a flannel shirt, open at the neck, and a coat of rags. This last, until the night before, belonged to a scarecrow, for the boy had discarded his own twenty good miles up the country. The exchange was of real rather than apparent advantage. Now he began to run again, and he ate a turnip while he ran, for his stomach was

empty and craved filling. At a gap in the hedge he went through, and reached a lane that extended beside the field. For a moment he waited to see if still pursued. But he found that the labourer who had discovered him was still following. The man kept a steady pace, but evidently could not go very fast; the boy therefore guessed that a short and speedy bustle would best serve his purpose. In this manner he might unsight his enemy once for all.

The lane opened on to a highroad, and the road was empty. He followed it, therefore, and before the pursuer had emerged upon it, he turned again, where a bypath opened off on the other side. It led beneath an avenue of fir-trees to a huddle of buildings that clustered round about a tower. Right ahead of him was a glass door, and to the right, where a blunger stood against the side of the pottery and all the place was stained and spattered with red mud, there opened a great door into darkness.

At another time the boy had avoided such a trap, for he could not know what lay ahead; but to-day he was unutterably weary in mind and body. Great experiences had passed over him and left him numbed and dazed. The splendid vigour and vitality of youth belonged to him, but severe strain had been put upon them, and he stood at the end of his physical resources. The promise of darkness and possible peace appealed to his bewildered senses, and he plunged into the gloomy aperture, as a hunted rat plunges into a strange hole.

Accident so ordered his entry that none saw it,

and although he now entered the portals of a hive where there worked near half a hundred men and boys, not one for the space of ten seconds was visible—a time sufficient to give the intruder safe hiding.

For a moment the great chamber into which he plunged seemed dark, but a fan of light fell from the doorway and showed a mighty mound of coal piled in the midst. This gleamed red on one side, white upon the other; while behind it all was infinitely black. Into the gloom the lad stumbled, proceeded as far as he was able, and finally flung himself down. He feared that the beating of his heart would betray him, but none had heard that, nor yet his panting. For there were louder sounds.

He looked about him, and his eyes were tamed to the darkness and began to see. Dim daylight did not lack, where a small semicircular window, high aloft, let fall a straight shaft of velvety brightness from above. It came slantwise down, struck the ragged mound of the coal, and oozed out in a disc upon the earthen floor. Behind this circle of light arose the mighty mass of a kiln—a brick pile all clamped and bound with steel that ascended half-way to the roof. Beneath, along the begrimed floor, opened the mouths of the furnaces, six in number, and three were dark, while three glared like huge red eyes out of an ebon setting. Their iron bars were red hot, and behind them a terrific incandescence blazed and lit the surrounding gloom with its fiery glow. The quality of this light was of intense red-gold, pouring forth like liquid from behind red-hot iron. Its

ineffable lustre splashed the darkness dully, but did not penetrate it; and from behind the furnaces came the low thunder of the great flame masses that ran every way upward within.

No ceiling bridged the chamber, and the hollow roof was like a night sky, where glimmered a star or two, for faulty tiles admitted here and there a spark of daylight; while the illumination from below outlined with red streaks the skeleton of the structure, and dimly touched the girders and square beams that supported it.

In the midst of the great floor lay fifty tons of coal, with many faggots of brushwood, and round about—some empty, some laden with earthenware for the kilns—stood the potters' six-foot boards. A flight of wooden stairs ascended from the furnace-room, and other doorways opened upon the north and east of it. The grating pulses of machinery throbbed at hand, mingling with the steady breath of the fire.

This much the stranger noted; then came footsteps and voices, and he crouched in his black lair unseen.

The runaway had feared for a time that his pursuer's body would fill the entrance at any moment; but alarm in that quarter was groundless, for the countryman had lost him and abandoned the hunt.

There came now men and boys with tins of food, and set them on the ovens; for the dinner-hour was near, and a row of little vessels soon simmered and steamed nigh the furnaces. Then a bell brayed; the endless belts that ran from a steam-engine to the wheels and lathes aloft re-

volved no more; the engine stopped its panting, and work ceased.

Twenty men trailed down the steps and emerged from the doors. Some passed through the furnace-house, and departed on bicycles or on foot; others settled within the genial glare of the fires, and turned attention to tins and basins which held the midday meal. The unseen boy peeped out of the darkness and sniffed the food. He listened while talk ran among the workers.

The engine-man, Jeremiah Tolley, was tall and sallow, with black hands and bright, kindly eyes. He controlled the blunger, too, and mixed the clay—labour that stained his “overalls” and jacket to redness. He sat beside Sam Punchard, a master fireman. He also was sallow, and the nature of his calling, where he circled in the heat of the furnaces, brought forth a permanent moisture on his brow. His face shone with heat, and his black beard, turning to grey, also shone. When he opened a furnace-door the light rolled out upon him in a flood, and his lean, grimy figure was transformed so that he seemed to glow red hot. He was careless of his health, and would go from his furnace to the open air with indifference, but he liked the warmth, and lived within reach of it. He slept little, and was well pleased to sit up with his furnaces three nights a week. There, through the long hours of darkness, he dwelt in that ebony cave, shovelling coal, regulating the temperature of his ovens, and taking a trial now and then to mark the progress of the baking.

Of late the fire-tortured kilns had been rebuilt,

and now Tolley asked the fireman if he was satisfied.

"The ware tells you better than what I can," answered Mr. Punchard. "I don't want to see anything better, and nothing better could be seen."

This satisfactory state of things had put Sam in a good humour—a condition not always common to him; just now he exhibited a genial spirit over his dinner. A mood of cheerfulness indeed animated the group, for Christmas was near, and it so fell that five holidays would come together. The works were destined to close upon a Tuesday, and not open again till the following Monday.

They chaffed a newcomer who had been tried in various departments and found wanting. He was a fair lad, with a face of unconquerable good-humour and the frame of an athlete.

"And what might you be doing now, Jack Ede?" asked Mr. Tolley. "Since you left the presses, I ain't seen much of you; but I heard you was very busy breaking things in the packing-room."

"Jack of all trades and master of none, you'll soon be," foretold William Godbeer. He was a turner, a man of quiet and humorous countenance, with an expressive mouth and a twinkling eye. None knew the mysteries of ceramics better than he, for while many of George Easterbrook's staff were content with mastery in their own branch of labour, and cared nothing what happened to the clay before it came to them, or after it left them again, Godbeer had always felt a far-reaching and intelligent concern in the great se-

quence of events which went to making even a penny toy. He understood each problem and its solution; the clay was an intellectual interest to him, and its possibilities never ceased to occupy his mind. But he felt not the emotion that belonged to another man who sat near him now; he did not share with Thomas Body, a thrower, that strange domination by the clay that is often exhibited by those who work in it. Godbeer was no fanatic, and never worshipped the stuff by which he lived; but for him it possessed a fascination inside reason, as opposed to that irrational devotion of the older man. Mr. Body was sixty, and his soul and body were steeped in clay. He revered it; it stood to him for life as well as a living. There were times when he became excited and incoherent about it, and his future offered problems. He was a good, not a great, thrower; but the willing slave knew his limitations. This man had not washed before coming to his meal. His thin beard and grey whiskers were spattered with the ruddy earth; his hands and brow were stained with it.

Jack Ede denied that he was breaking crockery in the packing-sheds.

“I’m along with you, ain’t I, Mr. Coysh?” he asked; and Timothy Coysh made answer. He was an elderly, full-bodied man, with a big jolly face and a blue chin, and he wore a blue jersey, like a sailor’s. His elder brother, Foster Coysh, had been one of Easterbrook’s original hands and was now dead.

“Yes, Jack’s at the teapot-spouts along with

me. I don't say as I'll never teach him to make 'em, but I haven't given up hope."

"I'd sooner make the handles," ventured Jack; whereon one Rupert Marsland, a "handler" and painter, laughed him to scorn.

Marsland was young, and entertained a cheerful conceit of himself. He had set the handles to many hundreds of thousands of teapots with accuracy and perfection. Perhaps there was not a man in England who could put a handle to a pot better than he did. But the exact significance and perspective of this modest operation had escaped Mr. Marsland.

"*You to think you can handle!*" he said. "I'd like to see those leg-of-mutton paws rolling clay for handles!"

Mr. Punchard, who liked Jack Ede and did not admire the speaker, took him to task with irony.

"Ah," said he, "you and the Almighty be a pair, Rupert! He puts the tails on the sheep and cows, and you put the handles on the teapots. I'm sure I don't know which be the smartest bit o' work. No doubt you reckon that your job takes most doing."

"So it does, then," declared the handler stoutly. "For why? A sheep's tail is just a natural object —like your ugly nose, Sam Punchard. It comes, because it's got to come and can't do otherwise. There's a lot of difference between nature and art, but you living down here in the coals don't understand these things."

Mr. Godbeer spoke:

"Art's a big word, Rupert. I never heard tea-pot handles called 'art' before, did you, Tom

Body! To roll clay and cut it into pieces and stick it on a pot ain't art, my son."

"Well, it ain't nature; and so if it ain't art, what is it?" asked Mr. Marsland.

"Craft, Rupert—skilled craft," replied the fireman. "Quite a clever little job in its little way, but no more to be named alongside Godbeer's work on the lathe, or Body's on the wheel, or mine in the oven, than you are worthy to be named alongside us."

"The clay's first," said Mr. Body. "The clay's first and last—the beginning and the middle and the end of pottery. Then comes us, that do for it; and 'tis a nice question how we stand to it. 'Tis a sort of king be the clay, if you ask me, and we're the servants—some small and some great."

"And each of us thinks his job's the most important—and quite right, too," declared Godbeer.

He spoke in jest, but when the assertion was examined it seemed that the turner had hit the truth.

They argued each for himself in great good-humour, but none convinced another.

"The thrower shapes, the turner makes," said Godbeer.

"'Tis I that make," retorted Jeremiah Tolley. "Without me and my steam-engine, where's the clay, William?" But Mr. Body held the question almost impious.

"Good Lord, Jeremiah! You to pretend that you make the clay! 'Tis the clay makes you, in my opinion."

"I make the clay most certain sure, Thomas. 'Tis mud till it comes to me—stuff you could grow

turnips in. I say till the clay goes through the lawn it ain't clay at all, but just earth off the fields. We all know that."

Mr. Tolley's theory was, however, disputed by Thomas Body, while the others argued for and against it.

William Godbeer summed up.

"We're all a machine," he said, "and none can tell how useful he is till he's away. We're all wanted, and the clay can no more show its cleverness without us than we can show our cleverness without the clay. We lift the clay into cloam, and the clay lifts us into useful men."

"We come and we go, William, like the bees come and go from the hive," declared Body; "but the clay flows on for ever—same as the precious honey flows."

Then fell diversion, for a sudden noise appeared to break from the heart of the heap of coal beside them, and a white face looked out of the darkness. Fire struck on the runaway's countenance and revealed his features.

"Who the mischief are you?" cried Punchard, as the boy scrambled over the coals and stood before them.

"Give me a bite for the Lord's sake, master, then I'll tell you. I've been watching you chaps feast, and—I've had nothing but a turnip for two days."

"A worthless dog, I'll warrant," declared Mr. Punchard; but he left the last morsels of his pudding at the bottom of a basin and handed it to the boy. They were gone in a moment.

"Thank you for that," said the stranger.
"Who comes next? No decent offer refused."

His eyes were bright and his face thin. The red glow from the ovens showed a hollow in his cheeks, revealed his thin arms and legs, and gleamed on his round, closely cropped head. His mouth was hard and strong, his forehead high. He stared them out of countenance. One might have perceived that this boy of seventeen possessed a stronger will than most of his hearers.

But he was civil enough and grateful enough for the scraps they cast to him. He ate everything that could be eaten; gnawed the bone of Godbeer's chop; sucked the gravy from a tin that had held Thomas Body's stew; finished Rupert Marsland's bread and cheese, and consumed an apple Jack Ede threw to him.

While he ate he repeated his thanks.

"I'm obliged, I'm sure," he said. "I've never been hungry before yesterday, and it's a damned sort of feeling—takes you in the middle and makes you feel as if you was falling in half."

"And how did you come to it, and where have you run from?" asked Godbeer. "No use for you to tell us you haven't run away from somewhere, because we all know very well you have."

"Not that I'd blame you for that as far as it goes," declared Coysh. "I ran away to sea myself when I was your age, and pretty much the same daddy-long-legs sort of young youth. And after I'd been to sea six months, I was fed up with it and ran away to shore again."

The boy looked at them out of the corners of his

dark brown eyes. For a moment he did not answer.

"You'd best to speak up," declared the engine-man, Jeremiah Tolley.

"And tell us," added Punchard, "firstly your name, and, secondly, where you've come from, and, thirdly, why you done it."

"So I will, then," answered the lad, with sudden frankness. "My name's Harvey Porter, and I've run away from a workhouse; and who wouldn't?"

"That ain't a workhouse coat," said Ede.

"No—I got it off a scarecrow up Exeter way. I wasn't going to be given away by a coat. Their jacket is at the bottom of the river with a stone in it."

The general opinion was that Harvey Porter had done well.

"If the guardians couldn't get you proper work at your age, then I don't blame you for setting out to seek it for yourself," declared Godbeer.

"What can you do?" asked Mr. Body.

"I've never been taught anything to name, but I'm very wishful to learn," answered the boy. Then he asked a question: "What might you men be?"

"This is a pottery—the Brunel Pottery—well known by them that understand such things all the world over. But no matter about us. 'Tis you that's the point. What are you going to do when you clear out of this?"

Mr. Tolley asked the question.

But the boy showed no desire to clear out. He accepted a cigarette from Marsland, smoked it as

one long familiar with the business, and played with Mr. Tolley's dog—a wire-haired terrier, who spent most of his time in the engine-room.

"I haven't thought on that. The first thing was to get clear of the beastly Union. I just slipped from stone-breaking, and ran and ran. And I don't know where I've reached to more than Adam. I thought I'd keep going till I got to the sea, and then trust to luck."

They told him where he was, and he evinced a strong desire to go no farther.

"All I want is work, and by the look of it the work here's terrible interesting," he said.

The remark pleased Mr. Body.

"You've got sense seemingly," he answered. "And you speak a truer word than you know."

Porter declared that he would much like to stop among them, and Mr. Marsland spoke:

"'Tisn't very likely the boss would have much use for a runaway workhouse boy, however," he prophesied.

But this some doubted.

"He'd be like me there," asserted Samuel Punchard, as he stoked a furnace and slabbed moisture over the sealed mouth of an oven to test the heat. "George Easterbrook would think no worse of you for running away from a workhouse; but that's not to say he's got any use for another boy. There's six of the toads here now."

Porter considered:

"Would it be any harm if I went before the master? Would he see me?"

"He'd see you," declared Godbeer, "and then you'll see a man that is a man."

"I'm never afraid of a man," answered the youth. "There weren't no men where I came from—only slave-drivers—God damn the swine!"

He showed his teeth, and memory lit an evil expression in his face. But the contortion passed instantly. A bell rang, and the men knocked out their pipes and rose to work.

"Take me before your master," begged the boy. Then he turned to Punchard:

"You're the head man, I reckon. Won't you do it?"

"Yes, that's so," admitted the fireman, not ill pleased at the recognition. "But as to taking a scarecrow——"

"If you don't, I'll see him on my own," said Porter.

"Ah! Now we know why the Union workhouse was a few sizes too small for you, laddie," laughed William Godbeer; and Mr. Punchard yielded.

"Come on, then, you masterful rip!" he said, and marched out of the dark chamber into the air with Porter at his heels.

CHAPTER IV

A MAN IN TWO MINDS

"WELL, Punchard, and what do you want?" asked George Easterbrook.

He sat behind his desk in his office—a small chamber of somewhat distinguished appearance. There was no parade of business, but the signs of success hung upon the wall over the fireplace, for there might be seen in black ebony frames the medals of gold, silver, and copper won by Brunel pottery at various international exhibitions in Europe and Canada.

Easterbrook was grey, with a bright, healthy complexion. Age had modelled his chin and neck a little—pinching folds here, digging dents there, and scratching a wrinkle or two where all was once full and firm; but his face remained clean-cut and hard, his blue eyes were as bright as when they first rested on Brunel's tower. His hair had retreated from his forehead; but he wore it longer than of old, and his beard was also allowed to grow at will instead of being close clipped as of yore. The hair on his eyebrows had coarsened and grown into a tangle, and the old somewhat sulky look still marked his face. Life had flattered the man in many particulars and disappointed him in some.

The desired son came not, but his daughter he

dearly loved, and, outside his work, she had grown to be the prime interest of life. His work, however, came first, and always had done so. No wife or child would have had the power to supplant potting in his passionate devotion.

Samuel Punchard was a favourite, and knew it. The head fireman possessed rare gifts. His work was of vital importance, for to understand the process of lifting a kiln to its limit of heat and controlling temperatures that ranged to two thousand degrees was a craft that called for peculiar skill, and a sort of intuition denied to most. The fate of every crock depended upon Mr. Punchard, and he enjoyed proportionate respect and emolument. He was scrupulous, proud of his importance, and took himself with becoming seriousness.

"'Tisn't what I want—'tis what this boy wants, Mr. Easterbrook. He came among us out of the coal—hid there from a man who was running after him for stealing a turnip. Been doing a good bit of running away from his fellow-creatures lately, by all accounts."

The boy touched his head with his forefinger, and Easterbrook regarded him with a straight stare. He saw a lad weary and worn, filthy and dejected; but neither dirt nor physical exhaustion could kill the expression of his face. It brimmed with intelligence, and his dark eyes spoke of a swift and understanding mind behind them.

"Leave him," said the master. "I'll talk to him."

Punchard departed; and, after studying Por-

ter's countenance a moment longer, Easterbrook spoke.

His first word was one of kindness:

"Sit down on that chair, and tell me why you stole turnips."

The boy on his side was measuring the speaker. His wits worked, and his knowledge of man—wide for his years—told him what he wanted to learn. He considered, then answered:

"I was starving hungry, sir, and I had to eat something, or I'd have dropped down. I've run away from a workhouse up the country. They kept me to dog's work, and I wouldn't stand it. I want to learn to do clever things, and they kept me down and wouldn't give me a helping hand. I'm ready to go heart and soul at anything. I'm quick with my hands, and I want to train 'em to something that calls for more cleverness than breaking stones."

"They'll find you."

The boy grinned and showed very white teeth.

"Not if you don't give me up, sir."

"I shan't give you up—that's not my business."

"God's my judge, there's usefulness in me," declared Porter. "I'm only hoping and praying to find somebody to trust me and give me a chance. I'm alone in the world. My mother died after I was five years old. My father's dead, too. I stand here without a living soul to have a care for me. I'm terrible wishful to find a friend to give me a chance."

He spoke with art, and Easterbrook was dimly aware of it. He had never known a boy of seventeen to utter his thoughts so neatly. Yet it seemed

impossible to suppose the lad was acting. He looked straight into the elder's eyes; his voice rang true. Easterbrook felt mild interest· but a thread of suspicion was woven into it.

"I doubt you're lying," he said.

The boy's manner changed, and an expression of distrust and fear crossed his face.

"It's true, master," he answered. "If I was to tell you the name of the workhouse where I ran from, you could prove it."

"Then tell me."

"It ain't fair to make me," argued the runaway. "How do I know you wouldn't send me back?"

"Why shouldn't I send you back?"

"Because you're a proper man, and surely to God you don't think none the worse of me for running away from a damned——"

"You needn't swear about it. We have no swearing here." Harvey Porter got up.

"I won't tell you. I won't trust nobody no more. I'll go."

"Suppose I send for a policeman and give you in charge for stealing turnips on your own confession?"

The boy laughed.

"You wouldn't do that. You're not that sort. You're a gentleman. I wish you could be a friend to me; but it's too much to ask, no doubt. I'd work in a way to astonish you a good bit."

"Will you tell me where you come from?"

The boy did not reply immediately.

"No, sir," he said, at length.

"Why not? Don't you trust me?"

"I trust your face, sir; but I've learned a few things at the workhouse. You can't get nothing for nothing. If I put myself in your power for nothing—what's the use to me?"

Easterbrook uttered a short, somewhat mirthless laugh.

"D'you reckon you're in a case to make a bargain?" he asked.

"It's now or never," answered the boy quietly. "I know I'm good for something, because I've compared myself with other boys, and never yet seen the boy I couldn't beat. But, of course, they was only workhouse boys. I can read and write well, and I'm good at figures. But what I want is to use my hands. I'd like to be in a works if I could; and if I was, I'd very soon be worth more than my food to anybody. But as to giving myself up to a policeman, I can do that for myself without any help from you, master. And I ain't going to do it—until I've tried all I know to get work."

"You'll have to look far with that story."

The boy's eyes had been fixed on one of the frames of medals. He touched it, and then sat down again.

" 'Twas a bit askew," he said. Then he was silent and did not answer Easterbrook's last remark; but when the master regarded Porter again he found his dark, brilliant eyes fixed unblinking on his face.

He was drawn to the youth, and knew not why. He began to grow impatient with himself, for upon his own judgment of character he prided himself keenly. He had never proved in error

before, yet here offered a puzzle, and he could not instantly fathom it. Porter affected him in two ways. Much about him appealed to the man; something about him repelled. He resented this confusion of thought, for his mind was never confused.

"Be off," he said, "and here's a shilling for you. I can't waste more time talking."

He took a shilling from his pocket, and held it out; but the boy made no response.

"A shilling's no use to me, sir, though thank you kindly, I'm sure. I won't keep you, and I'm greatly beholden to you for giving me a thought. And—may I be so bold as to make you an offer before I clear out?"

"Make me an offer!"

"Give me one job—one day's work—if 'tis only to clear up all that muck outside the works. There's Jack Ede—'Jack of all trades,' the men call him. I'd do more for you in a day than he could in a week."

"What d'you know about Jack Ede?"

"He gave me an apple."

"And you'd like to take his job?"

"I ought to have his job if I'm a better man than him. That's the survival of the fittest."

Easterbrook was staggered.

"So you've read books, have you?"

"All I could ever get my hands on."

"Be off!"

"Give me a chance, master. You'll never regret it."

"I can't, and I won't."

Porter rose and looked round regretfully.

"The men was very friendly to me, sir."

"Why not?"

"Suppose I was to come back again, when you could spare a moment, and——"

Easterbrook rose.

"Go along," he said. "I can never spare a moment."

"I'm sorry to God, then," answered the other. "Somehow, along with the men, I felt as though I'd got on the road again; but——"

He went out, and the master, now removed from the disturbing influence of his presence, had leisure to examine his own thoughts. To be in two minds was a condition exceedingly unusual; to like and dislike in a breath appeared extraordinary to him.

He decided that he had done well, and doubted not that his intuition had not erred in suspecting. It was Porter's obvious cleverness that attracted him, as all cleverness attracted him; but clever people, he had found, were often dishonest, untruthful, and insincere. To ignore this afterthought of dislike for the sake of an obvious attraction would have been dangerous, so Easterbrook told himself. The boy was no concern of his, and to undertake any sort of responsibility in face of this secret warning from within must be weakness.

He dismissed the matter, though some sort of shadowy discomfort clung to his mind. For an hour he worked at writing of letters and checking of figures; and during that hour—perhaps once in every twenty minutes or so—a disagreeable subconscious emotion crossed him. He stopped to

examine what it might be, and found it was the boy.

Presently he discovered that he was frankly regretful at the action he had taken. Porter's face returned to him as a pleasant and attractive vision, and his voice was also agreeable. He grew impatient and vexed with himself. He retraced his reflections, and felt exceedingly surprised to find that he had permitted something like a vague fear of the boy to influence him. He scorned himself upon this absurd discovery. He pushed away his work, lighted his pipe, set it down, and regarded the case of awards that the boy had put straight on the wall. Then he found himself looking at the chair on which the boy had sat.

Presently he wrote again, and then, seeking Punchard, went out into the works. There stood the boy. Part of Easterbrook was glad at the sight, and part of him was annoyed. He felt considerable surprise; because he was accustomed to command and be obeyed swiftly. In the matter of bidding Porter go about his business, he had measured his own mind and will; but not the mind and will of the boy. To find, therefore, that the boy had not instantly fallen in with his direction and carried himself clear of the works, astonished the master for a moment. Then he perceived that this boy also had his own life to live and ideals to pursue; he understood that though he wished Porter away, Porter, viewing the situation otherwise, did not wish himself away, and felt that he had everything to gain by not going away. He had not, therefore, felt himself under any urgent compunction to do as he was bid. Yet it seemed that

he had not defied authority. He was in the engine-room very busy polishing up some metal-work, and when Easterbrook spoke, Jeremiah Tolley made answer:

“ ‘Tis like this—the lad had a bit of food back along—a crust here and a bone there—and he was hopeful that you’d give him a rough job to make up for it. And that particular he is, or pretends to be, that when he came out and told me that you couldn’t find a job for him, nothing would do but he stopped and worked out the price of his victuals—says he won’t go till he has.”

“There was nothing for him to do.”

“There wasn’t” admitted Mr. Tolley, “nothing he could do, anyway; so I just gave him an oiled rag and let him polish a bit. He’s wishful to please; but so’s everybody when they’re hungry.”

The boy spoke without any apparent consciousness that he had disobeyed:

“I’m just off, master, but the chaps gave me a proper feed for kindness, and I don’t want nobody to be the loser by me.”

Easterbrook again turned his mind in upon itself. Was this honesty, or guile? Was this clever boy also a conspicuously honest one, or merely a very cunning one? Again awoke the curious, conflicting judgments that had troubled him an hour ago. His heart yearned to the boy, and he knew it; yet there persisted the sinister challenge from his head.

He condemned the warning and swept it aside with an imperious impulse. Was a man to be at the mercy of an instinct that his own larger sense over-ruled? Was he to suspect a fellow-creature

in sore tribulation at the impact of a whim—a fleeting emotion impossible to explain to himself?

"Has your lodger gone?" he asked the engine-man.

"He's gone."

"Then take in this boy and let him begin outside to-morrow."

"Instead of Davy Luke, sir?"

"Instead of Davy Luke. Luke can go on wedging. One week this boy can work, and at the end of it I'll hear what you've got to say. A penny an hour he shall have; and tell him to get a decent coat and hat before tomorrow."

Easterbrook addressed no word to Harvey Porter, and the boy stood silent and heard what had been planned for him. To the last the master spoke in two minds, and his peculiar confusion took this shape: that he addressed Tolley instead of the stranger. But Porter's instinct was swift to appreciate this. He was conscious that this action on the other's part had broken through some impediment and called for some questioning before it became accomplished. Something told him not to speak or express his gratitude at that juncture. Therefore, he did not speak, though a great sigh of thanksgiving escaped him.

The master departed to seek Punchard, and Mr. Tolley inquired the reason for Porter's silence.

"Couldn't you thank the man? 'Tis simple charity on his part, for we don't want you."

"I'm going to thank him," answered the boy. "He'll see. And I'm properly glad I'm put under you, and you shan't regret it, Mr. Tolley."

CHAPTER V

THE BEGINNING OF THE CLAY

JEREMIAH TOLLEY lived at Hele, a village some three parts of a mile from his work. He was married and childless, and the spare room in his home accommodated a lodger when he could find one. For the moment it was empty, and since his master had desired him to do so, Jeremiah took Porter home with him and explained the situation to his wife.

She raised no objection, and before he had been in the house an hour the boy tried to arrange for a loan, and undertook to pay it with his week's wages.

"A penny an hour is eightpence a day," he said. "That's three and fourpence, and fourpence more for the half-day is three and eightpence. I'll give you the lot on pay-day if you'll let me have half a crown for a coat and cap."

But Jeremiah promised him a coat.

"We're near of a size," he declared, "and the coat is pretty good, and you can pay by instalments. We shall want your money for your keep, and 'tis any odds we shall have enough of you at Brunel's Tower in a week."

The boy thought not.

"If I can't make good in a week, I'm a fool," he declared.

Mrs. Tolley frankly liked Porter, and pronounced him a clever boy, with honesty written on his handsome countenance; but her husband felt less assured.

"These here smooth-tongued chaps ain't always to be relied upon," he declared. "Not that I've anything against him. He's civil and willing naturally, but he's a bit too smart in my opinion. He'll want to run afore he can walk, I reckon—he's that sort."

"The young should have a good conceit of themselves," she answered, "and to see a workhouse boy that haven't had his spirit broke is something in itself."

Next morning, through the dimpsy light, Porter, in Mr. Tolley's old coat, set forth beside the engine-man at six o'clock.

The pottery rose grey through the low mists of dawn, and Brunel's Tower, with the great silvery planes of the main roof beneath it, resembled a house of prayer rather than a house of work.

"For all the world like a church," said Porter. "It rises up among the trees with the green fields round it. You'd never think it was what it is."

"Wait till the steam and smoke's flying," answered Mr. Tolley. "Here's Sam Punchard, you see; he's going home now for a rest, because he was up with the furnaces all last night, but now the work's done and the kilns are cooling. Morning, Samuel!"

Mr. Punchard nodded, but did not stop.

"Morning, Jeremiah."

"Kilns working all right?"

"Amazing well."

"We've just had our kilns rebuilt," explained Mr. Tolley. "The solid fire-brick is eaten away in time, and melts and coats the inside of the kilns with glass; but now all's made new, and Mr. Punchard's doing wonders."

A man or two passed them on bicycles, and Porter saw Jack Ede go by, and William Godbeer, the turner.

At seven o'clock they were at work, and Tolley explained his duties.

"Don't ask the reason for nothing at first," he said. "You do just exactly what you're told, and then you can know the reason after if you want to."

"I'll find the reasons for myself," answered Porter; "there's nothing so interesting to me, Mr. Tolley, as finding the reasons of things."

"Don't you be too inquisitive, for all that. There's some things done in these works that don't give their reasons. There's secrets, and the less you trouble yourself with them the better."

"All great works have got secrets," said the boy. "I'm glad we've got secrets, too."

He used the "we" wholeheartedly, and it was apparent from the intelligent manner in which he set to work that he hoped, if the power was in him, to justify his existence under Brunel's Tower.

Mr. Tolley showed him a heap of mud, and then conducted him to a cutting in a field not far distant, where another clay seam ran through a meadow. Like a red gash it cut the green, and above it, under hedgerows where the elms shone touched to gold through the grey mist, were ewes.

A man stood in a cart and flung out turnips to them.

" 'Tis a wonderful thing to work at skilled labour in the midst of the country," said the boy. "I never thought of machinery and steam and suchlike in such a place as this."

"Don't let your mind run on, nor your tongue neither," answered the other. "Turn over that wheelbarrow, and list to me."

Porter learned that the clay from the field held sand and was "short," and that the clay from the mound beside the works was "fat."

"You mix 'em, and they stand together and help each other," explained Mr. Tolley. "The two sorts shrink differently under heat, and the fat clay shrinks too much by itself, so we add the short clay to it—not half and half, but two to one. Now fill the barrow and fetch it along."

He watched, and marked that Porter had never used a spade until now. He then showed him how to cut out the clay to the best advantage, and followed him with the barrow.

"Don't put aside the crocks," said Tolley, when they returned to the mound beside the works. "The broken stuff's clay still. We grind it up again along with the rest. This machine's the blunger—'tis here the clay begins, you may say. We fling it in 'short' and 'fat,' and the wheels inside revolve by steam, and churn the stuff up with water until all's liquid as a puddle in the road."

The blunger, which stood clay-stained—a huge red splash on the outer wall of the works—was filled presently. When Tolley had got up steam,

he set it in motion, while Porter watched the mass worked with water into liquid.

The boy evinced pleasure in seeing the red earth dominate him, creep over him, stain his trousers, spatter his shirt, and ruddy his arms and hands.

"I'll soon be as red as anybody!" he declared.

He worked hard, but was too slightly built for the draught of the wheelbarrow. This he swiftly discovered, and modified his methods accordingly. Chance willed that George Easterbrook came out of his office at a moment when the boy had returned with clay from the field.

"That's but half a load," he said, and Porter answered:

"'Tis this way, master: I fetched up four full loads, and then I found that it made my heart go funny here on my left side, because I'm rather light built unfortunately. So now I'm bringing half loads; but I can bring two half-loads just so quickly as I could bring one whole load, so it comes out the same in the end. I've told Mr. Tolley, sir, and he quite sees it."

"If Tolley sees it, that's all right," answered Easterbrook. "You've got well into the clay, I see—you're not frightened of it."

Porter grinned.

"Not yet," he said.

After dinner Mr. Tolley revealed a further process, and showed how the liquid clay passed from the blunger through a little sieve called the "lawn."

"Every pot on the works, from the latest penny toys to the great vases that Mr. Pitts decorates, have flowed through that," he explained. "'Tis

just a bit of copper gauze—so fine that there's very near a hundred mesh to the square inch. The clay goes through in particles so small that your eyes couldn't see 'em separate; and then they come together again and pour into the settling-pit inside, and there they settle for four-and-twenty hours, and then you call the clay 'slip.' ”

Porter examined the copper sieve with profound interest.

“Terrible expensive things are ‘lawns,’ for the mesh is wove as fine as a spider’s web you might say and you can’t ask such fine stuff to wear long against the rush of the clay,” explained Mr. Tolley.

The boy’s eyes sparkled.

“If anybody was to invent a sieve that never could wear out, it would be a brave saving,” he said.

“‘If’—yes. There’s a lot of ‘ifs’ in potting. ‘If’ crockery never broke, for instance, we’d shut down in six months.”

“I wonder now,” mused the other, with his eyes on the sieve, “if there’s any metal but copper wouldn’t do better and last longer. Or, maybe, if you mixed something else with the copper, or——”

“You mind what I told you. You learn what we know afore you begin to teach us better.”

After this rebuke Harvey Porter kept his mouth shut and his thoughts to himself. His power of observation was great, and when the general principles of Mr. Tolley’s work had been explained to him, he concentrated on those duties the engineer demanded. He proved willing and expedi-

tious. It was his speed that impressed Jeremiah, for in his experience the quick boy was often careless, and he cautioned his new assistant more than once to go slower. In truth, the work of the engine, blunger, and settling-trough was not of a sort to tax anything but Porter's physical strength. He had mastered it after two days at the pottery, and was stoking efficiently under Jeremiah's eye on the third day.

The more complicated machinery of the press took longer, but Mr. Tolley had a very lucid manner of exposition, and the boy soon perceived how the clay, after settling as "slip" to the consistency of liquid cream in the vat, was sucked therefrom by a steam-pump and forced into the clay-press. Here stood a square wooden chest of sixteen compartments, held together by steel rods; and through a nozzle into each chamber the pump pressed the fluid "slip." Within the press were packed coarse canvas cloths, to catch the clay, and a full press, when opened, produced half a ton of perfected clay, which broke out from the cloths in stiff cakes, the colour of chocolate.

Porter took immense interest in this machine. It was opened early in the morning that good store of clay might furnish the throwers and moulders; and the new boy made friends with other boys whose work was with the clay when it left the press.

Two lads smaller than himself Harvey met at this stage in his initiation. One was small, fair, and pale, with a laughing face and little, thin, tough arms which never tired; the other was taller, and was a year older than Porter. The

fair youngster was "Billy," the son of William Godbeer, the turner; the elder lad, called Charlie, was a nephew of Mr. Timothy Coysh, who moulded the teapot-spouts.

Porter made friends with Charlie and Billy, but not for long. They were boys, and he was not a boy, and never had been. But as time went on, he found that many boys, of all ages, worked at Brunel's Tower. A spirit of cheerful youth permeated the works; and few of the staff but had some hobby outside his business. Many of the hands were sportsmen, and enlivened the walls of their workrooms with pictures of football players and fighting men; while others cared for reading, and some, animated by Paul Pitts, began to appreciate the meaning of art.

The impressive fact was the spirit of content and amity that held the men together. Differences seldom arose, and when they did no man hesitated to submit them to Easterbrook. His instinct for justice and plain dealing had leavened the life of the pottery and developed into a tradition, which after thirty years was handed down to the newcomers unconsciously. It happened, of course, that men of different mould would sometimes come into the firm; but they were quickly merged in the lump, or if by strength of character, or idiosyncrasy, they could not bend to Easterbrook's rule, and brought an element of influence into the works that he disliked, they soon departed. He was seldom mistaken in his judgments, and honestly believed that he was never mistaken.

CHAPTER VI

THE STEEPLE-JACKS

THE monotony of life and work at Brunel's Tower was broken during Harvey Porter's week of probation by the arrival of two steeple-jacks, and in connection with them there happened an incident among the pottery boys that nearly brought disaster to the newcomer.

The venerable tiles that crowned the stack and made it beautiful were failing. From beneath they presented a broken and ragged rim, for frost and tempest through many years had frayed their edges and ruined their symmetry. Then came a gale which blew a couple of tiles through the windows below, and George Easterbrook, blaming himself for not acting sooner, sent at once for men to repair the crown of the tower.

They came, and were heroes to Charlie Coysh, Billy Godbeer, Harvey Porter, and the rest of the boys. Indeed, the temptation to shirk duty was more than the youngsters could resist, and often Tolley or Punchard, whose work lay below the stack, would cuff some boy standing staring upward with open mouth and idle hands, and send him about his business. Not thus, however, did Porter come to grief. No venial offence brought him into trouble, but a daring deed involving a question of direct disobedience.

The steeple-jacks were famous in their calling. They had hovered between heaven and earth a thousand times, and were familiar with the loftiest piles of brick or stone that men had lifted in England. To them Brunel's Tower was a minor incident of no special interest and without any difficulty of detail. Their ladders were bolted to the wall and they themselves on the top of the stack within two hours of their arrival. Then the pottery hands at their dinner below marvelled to see the elder of the visitors walking round the crown of the tower on a solitary board rigged from above with ropes. He was a middle-aged, stout man, short and broad, and he weighed above twelve stone. He moved with utmost deliberation, and took no shadow of risk that it was possible to avoid, but his work involved risk during half its progress, and to the uninitiated he appeared to be in peril. His mate was younger, and of a lithe, slight build. He promised to "go to great heights" in his profession, as the elder said of him, with a grin; but whether opportunity would bring him the fame that his master enjoyed was doubtful. For to the elder man had fallen the task on three occasions of ascending Nelson's Monument in Trafalgar Square, a climb of more than common difficulty.

"And I hope," he said, "to go up as often again, please God, for there's no reason why a man shouldn't do my work, if he knows how, till his nerve fails. My father did the same, and climbed till he was sixty. But he didn't have so much flesh on him as what I have: I grant that."

A strange sight followed the first day's work

of the steeple-jacks, for as dusk began to fall and they prepared to descend for the night, there grew out of the air an increasing cloud of birds. They were starlings, and their wont was to roost under the tiles of the tower—an immemorial custom doubtless handed down through generations. It was their breeding-place, also, and the workers, as they tore up the covering of the stack's crown, found along the eaves a nest under every tile. In a shower they descended, for the day of the birds was over, and their old haunt would know them no more.

They cried and swept about in the gloaming, and then, when the men had gone, assembled upon the tower a hundred strong. They chattered aloft until it was dark, then scattered with mournful cries to seek their nightly perches elsewhere. They had come to regard Brunel's Tower as part of the universal order, and the tiles thereon as their habitations. Now they returned, discovered that their aerial city had vanished, and were called to confront a catastrophe beyond their experience to match or their bird wits to measure.

In the course of his examination the master steeple-jack found more mischief than was guessed at; for a crack, invisible beneath, had developed under the summit of the tower. No blame attached to the bygone builders, because the purpose of its erection did not embrace fire. The atmospheric draught for which it was constructed had put no strain on the fabric; but thirty years of high temperatures left their mark, and metal clamps were called for to brace the upper courses.

Thus the work was prolonged, and the two men

employed upon it became familiar with the permanent hands.

The mishap to Porter, however, happened on the third day after their arrival.

Then, emerging from his office during the dinner-hour, George Easterbrook, casting his eyes aloft, was astonished to see the newcomer standing on the summit and waving some black object over his head to four other boys who stood watching him below. Charlie, Billy, and the others vanished, and Porter ceased to shout.

"Come down," said the master sternly, "and mind your footing."

He had been inclined to dismiss the boy upon the spot; but judging that if he heard his fate it might endanger Porter's descent, he did not utter it.

The boy hesitated; then putting the object that he held into his breast and buttoning his coat carefully over it, he began the descent, lowered himself feet first to the ladder and came down cautiously and slowly.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Easterbrook. "You had heard the order that none here, man or boy, was to go near the tower? You can come for your money to-night, and don't let me see you here to-morrow."

The boy stared and grew very pale.

"May I speak, sir?" he asked.

"What can you say?"

"I can say that God's my judge, I didn't know you had forbid it."

"I told Charlie Coysh to tell the rest."

"He didn't tell me. There's a plot against me.

They want me away, because if I stop I'll go over their heads. Before God, they didn't tell me; but they made a plot."

"What plot could they make? They couldn't send you up the tower."

"They could—for money. Money's everything to me. They bet me twopence each—the five of them—that I wouldn't go up when the climbing gentlemen's backs were turned. And that was tenpence for Mrs. Tolley. I don't want to run in debt. And if I'd known you forbid it, I wouldn't have gone. But money's money, and, though they was feared of it, I knew I wasn't. So I went up."

"You think Coysh didn't tell you and didn't let the others tell you on purpose?"

"Yes, I do, master. They knew when you heard that I'd been up, you'd put me away. But I wouldn't have gone for ten pounds, or even twenty, if I'd known you'd sent out orders against it."

Easterbrook considered. The story was plausible, for it seemed likely that Porter's advent might awaken jealousy.

"Go," he said. "I'll look into it."

The boy went away, then returned, and touched his cap.

"Begging your pardon, sir, this belongs to you. I found it poking about in the mortar up there. The gentlemen hadn't seen it yet. No doubt they'd have come to it when they'd cleared away more of the mess."

He brought from his coat a little black teapot somewhat weather-worn, but still sound. It exhibited a good glaze and was decorated with a

moulding of flowers. A chip in the spout showed the body to be red clay well fired. Porter left the piece in Easterbrook's hands and departed, while the master forgot him before the interest awakened by this discovery. He questioned the steeple-jacks, and they showed no surprise. It was, they said, a rule with their trade to leave some article behind them for a future generation to discover when next a perilous place was scaled. They begged for a piece of the Brunel pottery to leave at the top of the tower when their work was finished.

Anon the master spoke with Charlie Coysh. He, in common with the other boys, was the poorer by twopence, and he vowed very solemnly that he had told Porter he was not to ascend the tower.

“And then you all bet him money he wouldn’t?”

Charlie could not deny it; and there came over the master that wave of hesitation that had already marked his attitude to Porter. He argued the situation. On the face of it, the boy had lied; yet he might not have done so. It was only one boy’s word against another; while, concerning the extent of the temptation thrust in his way, there could be no question. Tenpence to Porter meant riches, and his assertion that he did not like to run in debt surely did him credit. A lie proved must have settled the matter at this crisis, but Easterbrook did not want to prove a lie.

As yet, he had not concerned himself with Porter’s performances, but now he sought Jeremiah Tolley and asked for a report. The engine-man had nothing but good to tell.

"He stands to work," declared Mr. Tolley, "and he's wonderful witty for a youngster. He makes his head save his heels, that boy does. He's civil and quick, and takes pains. He's got a learning head and a memory. I never see such a memory in a young boy before. That's the weakness of most of 'em. What you tell 'em goes in one side of their stupid heads and out at t'other; and often 'twill take a hard rap or two on their ear-holes to keep the learning in. But he calls home a thing very clever indeed, and he's a oner for questions."

"How does he behave at home?"

"Quite proper. He reads very nice, and saves my wife's eyes of a night, for he's terrible fond of the newspapers, and will go over 'em like a cat will go over a mouse."

"Civil and clean and well-spoken?"

"All that. My missis says he's cruel nice in his ways. She's rigged him out, so as he can change his clothes when he comes in of a night."

Easterbrook nodded, and from the darkness of the engine-room watched Porter, himself unseen. Harvey had now increased his education, and followed the clay from the press to the pug-mill. Here the slabs were crushed again, minced to pulp, and poured forth, like a glacier oozing over a moraine, to be stored in cellars.

There remained only to regulate the clay for the throwers and moulders in their shops above, and this work involved physical exercise that pleased the new boy. He vied with Charlie and the others at wedging the clay, and struggled with lumps of twenty and thirty pounds, which were mauled and

beaten on a board faced with tin, cut to pieces, and massed together again, until finally welded of even texture, free from air.

There was a tradition that a strong boy once had wedged in lumps of fifty pounds and created a record for the pottery; but Porter, following his method with the wheelbarrow, attempted no feats involving great physical strength. The purport of his process was swiftly appreciated by him, and he worked with medium masses, which he chopped and rechopped and slapped together with all his strength until their bulk was embodied in one coherent and homogeneous piece.

Easterbrook watched the boy under the flickering ray of an oil-lamp, for the wedging-table was in a dark corner. Porter toiled industriously, and showed by no sign the doubt that clouded his future.

Mr. Tolley's engine panted and hummed and flashed through the gloom, while from it spread bands aloft to the wheels and lathes. Men and boys came and went. Sometimes a man spoke to Porter, and the master noticed that all were kindly disposed towards him. Easterbrook approached, watched him at work, and gave him a hint or two.

It was his way of letting the boy know that he might regard himself as forgiven; and Porter understood.

At the end of the week he received his money, and was informed that he might go on for another week at the same wages if he wished to do so. He thanked Easterbrook with a flash of genuine emotion.

“D’you like the work?” asked his master.

“I want to master it.”

“D’you like it?”

The boy hesitated.

“Yes, I do then, because I’m wishful to go into the higher branches. Mr. Marsland, the gentleman who paints up over, has been friendly to me, and he says that the work down here is like the Bible.”

“Like the Bible! Why?”

Porter looked slyly up from under his eyelashes.

“Because it leads to better things above, sir.”

Easterbrook had no sense of humour. He grunted.

“You tell Marsland not to make profane jokes,” he said. Then he asked a question:

“D’you go to church?”

“I always had to go where I was, master.”

“You’d best to keep at it, then, till you’ve thought things out for yourself. I dictate to no man, but I’ve got to look after my boys a bit. Tolley goes somewhere, and mind you go along with him on Sunday.”

“Him and his missis are Wesleyans. Will it suit you if I go to chapel with ‘em?”

“Go somewhere with somebody from the works —somebody who can tell me on Monday you went. That’s all. I don’t trust you yet.”

“I’ll ask my friends, sir. There’s a good few here that’s kind.”

“Reward their kindness, then.”

CHAPTER VII

SUNDAY

THE household of George Easterbrook dwelt together in harmony, for a common interest knit all together, and a common love. To her father, to Paul Pitts, the bachelor, and to Sophia Medway, the ancient spinster, Joanna Easterbrook was alike precious; and they were dear to her. She and her great-aunt worked together, in an upper chamber of the pottery sacred to them, and when the time for dinner came, they ate it in the studio of Mr. Pitts, which stood close at hand. Then Sophia Medway would leave her paint-brushes for the table, and spread a cloth there and set out the simple meal. Sometimes Easterbrook joined his family, but he was not always at the works, and often pressure of business kept him in his office below, so that he saw nothing of Joanna and his aunt between breakfast and the hour of nine, when they took supper together.

The life at home was of a simple character, and conducted on lines that altered not. With access of means and an income that had justified more luxuries and leisure, neither George nor his life-long friend and partner felt any desire to modify their strenuous course. They regarded themselves as working potters, and all their energy, strength, and skill was sanctified to their business. They

rose early and retired early; their hobby was their garden, and their few holidays were generally devoted to it. On Sunday morning George permitted himself the prime pleasure of the week, and this was to touch the clay. On that day he had the works to himself, unless it happened that Punchard was there about the furnaces. Easterbrook arrived at nine o'clock, changed his clothes, and threw on the wheel for two hours. He still retained the touch of a master, and it was the pots that he made on the seventh day that Paul Pitts decorated during the week. These were the high-water mark of the Brunel ware, and now Easterbrook limited their output, so that he was able to raise their price. In his earlier days he had flooded the market out of his unsleeping energy; now he threw but a dozen or so a week; and for these a hungry demand existed. Paul Pitts was a Christian, and went to church with Sophia Medway; while Joanna did as she pleased, and sometimes accompanied them. But between the hours of nine and eleven she was usually with her father at the works. He threw with the string wheel, which was turned by hand, not steam, and the girl would have unwillingly sacrificed the privilege of that Sunday toil.

They dined at two o'clock on Sunday; then the men worked in their garden, or went walking until tea-time. Sometimes they visited their neighbours, for they had many friends. Miss Medway, however, made Sunday a day of complete rest. She was growing very old, and might have long ago ceased her painting; but work was life to her, and she struggled to banish the thought of giving

up. The position began to grow delicate, but none had the heart to bid her cease, though her failing hand and eyes spoilt many pieces. She cared nothing for money, and would not save her wages, but spent them on presents for her friends. She was of a saturnine and melancholy disposition, and relapsed more and more into herself as age won upon her.

On the Sunday following events last recorded, Paul Pitts stood in his garden plot, smoked his pipe, and regarded an object of great beauty. He had grown a plant of *Lilium giganteum*, the noble lily of the Himalayas; but now the great white trumpets and their purple throats had departed; their fragrance was fled with a vanished June. The phenomena of seed-bearing had followed, and the little green pods, slowly turning upwards, had swelled to greatness; first grown plump and green, then turned brown, then split and opened, to liberate the thousands of closely packed, flat seeds that they contained. Now upon a stalk ten foot tall the seed-cases were disposed like a candelabra wrought of brown agate on an amber stem. Each capsule was built of three wings, and a fret-work of little white teeth feathered between them. Within, the masterpiece was held together by a membrane that sprang from each wing and joined in the midst.

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fruit of the rose. He had a sense and feeling to win from such objects only what might fitly be translated into terms of plastic art; for he was severe with natural luxuriance and spontaneity of forms; but the seed-case of the giant lily showed Nature herself in a mood restrained and dignified. Such a spectacle was new to him, for none of his plants had ever produced such a splendidly formal and massive fruition.

He called Joanna, whose bedroom-window faced upon his flower-garden, and bade her come and consider what might be done with the seed-cases. She was dressed to start with her father, and joined Paul in the garden.

At seventeen, Joanna Easterbrook was a woman in body and mind. She was fair, with blue eyes, like her father's, and she inherited also his strength of purpose, energy, and power of application. Like him, she had a trick of leaving out of her life all that did not interest her; and since, until now, little had done so, her experience and knowledge were almost limited to her work. She was ingenuous and eager; she loved her painting very well, but lacked any creative instinct, and was content to reproduce the eternal daffodils and roses that experience had shown were the favourite flowers for the Brunel pottery. Sometimes came a great order from Ireland for ware to be sprigged with shamrocks; sometimes Scotland desired "the Cock of the North" on five thousand teapots or ash-trays; then she painted that lively bird again and again; but her pleasure was the flowers, and best she liked the red roses.

Joanna was well developed, and strong and fair

to look upon. Her father did not let her work full hours, and made her take bicycle rides and walks. She had a friend, a girl of her own age, the grand-daughter of another potter, whose works stood between Brunel's Tower and the sea. The establishment was smaller than that of Easterbrook and Pitts', and Nelly Todd did not work therein. The girls were close friends, and their elders often met; but Wilberforce Todd was older than Easterbrook, and his little pottery languished somewhat.

Now blonde Joanna joined "Uncle Paul," for so she always called Mr. Pitts. A spritely and cheerful spirit marked her. She was lively, sanguine, and easily pleased. All the boys at the pottery, and more than the boys, were in love with her; but she knew it not, and went her way as yet virgin of passion. Sex had barely dawned in her soul to puzzle her, and no lad had ever yet interested her more than another.

She admired the lily-stalk, and thought a design for a candlestick might be made from it. Then her father appeared, ready for the pottery, and together they set off. A tell-tale feather of dark smoke from the tower spoke of the furnaces, and, indeed, they were alight, for Mr. Punchard hated holidays, and contrived, when possible, to be busy on the seventh day. As this only involved his own labours, and George Easterbrook never interfered with Samuel's plans, there was none to object.

This morning, however, the fireman was not alone, for Porter attended him. He was lending

a hand with the stoking, and gleaned potter's lore from Mr. Punchard.

"Why didn't you go to church?" asked the master; but the boy had his answer ready.

"I'm going, sir—I'm going along with Mrs. Tolley this evening; and Mr. Punchard is going to take a trial presently; and he's been so very kind as to let me help him a bit, so as I might pick up a little learning about the ovens."

Easterbrook regarded the boy's keen face.

"What say you, Samuel?" he asked.

"He's been here since five o'clock this morning," answered Punchard; "and he's asked enough questions to sink a ship; and if I could tell him all I know, he'd have got it out of me; but as what I know and what I do can't be put in words, and as I can't tell him how I understand what a furnace is doing, any more than a dog can tell you how he hears and smells, he hasn't learned that."

"No—you can't teach that, Samuel."

"And a very good thing I can't—and I wouldn't if I could. For why? If it could be taught, it could be learned, and then I shouldn't be worth my money."

"I'd learn it if I was along with you a month, Mr. Punchard," ventured Porter; but the other scoffed.

"You young fox! Too clever by half, I reckon. You'd learn in a month what I took twenty years to learn? Not to mention the natural gift for it! You'll say next that you could throw pots in a week!"

Joanna regarded the boy with interest. She had

heard something of him, but this was the first time she had seen him. He, too, looked at her out of the corner of his eye, but with glance so swift and furtive that none observed him. He appeared to be ignorant of her presence.

Easterbrook, not ill pleased that the youth should manifest a will so keen to learn, spoke before ascending to the throwing room.

"Go on as you're going for a week," he said, "and maybe then I'll let you go round the works. If you've got the wits and want to follow the clay through, you shall. The man or boy that wills to learn won't find me come in the way. Next Monday week, if all's right, Tim Coysh, or another, shall show you round, like any other visitor—if nothing comes between. It rests with you."

Porter expressed profound thanks, and without more words the master and his daughter went their way aloft.

The boy was loud in expressions of gratitude, and Punchard approved them.

"Well may you say so. You don't know your luck yet. Them as get into this place—their fortune's made if they've got the sense to do their part. That man's half saint, and his word's better than another's oath. 'Tis a countless blessing for you that he's let you bide here, and I can promise you that if you do your share, he'll more than do his. There's great art in him—not only at the pot-making, but at man-making. Many and many in the last thirty years have been made here; and they've gone out into the world, like t'other pots, to do their work after he's built them up and baked 'em into usefulness. They

come clay and they go out cloam; and such is the nature of the man that, when they've reached a point beyond which they can't go here, he throws no obstacle in the way, but let's 'em go to bigger works, and helps to find 'em work. Of course, a man like me he won't let go, because I'm the sinews on his bone, so to speak, and I've had my share of making the fame of the place in my own way; but many a young and understanding fireman under me has reached a pitch when he was good for first place, and then he's gone and carried away to other potteries so much as I could teach him."

Porter drank in this speech, and already began to share Punchard's enthusiasm.

"You can see with half an eye that he's a great sort of man; and I'm terrible wishful to show him I value what he's done for me."

"No doubt he knew you'd feel like that," said Samuel. "For he reads the heart, like I read the furnace, or you read the newspaper. 'Tis his great gift to see what a bit of clay's good for. When first he come here—a stranger in a strange land—he's told me how, looking round about, though little used to the red earth, he found what it was good for, and handled it and read its powers. Though he grants that it promised less than it performed."

"I'd like to perform more than he'd expect, too," said Porter, and the fireman laughed.

"The first thing is to do just exactly what you're told to do—all the time and every time. And, for that matter, if you do so much as that, you'll astonish him, no doubt, because he under-

stands boys so well as men, and the human boy that's obedient every time don't happen."

"I'd much wish to surprise him with my cleverness," said Porter.

"You surprise him with your sense," answered the other. "There's lots of clever boys about, but a sensible one is rare as a white blackbird. At any rate, so I've found it. Now I'm going to take a trial."

Samuel approached the plastered side of the kiln where the wall was built up after the packing of the oven. One brick stood out from the rest, and this he now removed. Porter peered in, and saw the interior rendered visible by its own fiery light. A terrific heat encompassed the oven, and the unseen flames that roared through the flues above and below had turned all to a rosy-red splendour. Every pot and batt, from top to bottom of the close-packed oven, raged white-hot and almost transparent. One rich splendour of glowing colour flowed through the mass, and it seemed impossible that earth could stand the impact of such a temperature without crumbling into dust.

Mr. Punchard thrust in an iron rod and transfixes a small red-hot fragment placed ready for the purpose. He drew it forth, then another; and next he thrust back the brick into the wall, that no degree of the two thousand degrees within the oven should be lost.

Porter watched the clay cool, and as the red fire died out of it, there flashed upon its face bright colours under the polish of the glaze.

The sight attracted him, but he forgot the lesser interest of his own experience in the greater in-

terest of what the cooling clay told Mr. Punchard. Not the glaze, not the colours, but the tone of the red earth itself was Samuel's concern.

"A good trial," he said. "The new kilns are doing proper wonders. But we're not hot enough yet. Let me see you stoke the furnace, Harvey Porter."

CHAPTER VIII

A NEWSPAPER PARAGRAPH

ON Sunday evening Joanna generally read a newspaper aloud to her father, and it was only in this way that he kept a slight acquaintance with the news of the world. It did not interest him except as it touched his own business. Everything to do with ceramics arrested him, but the larger world and the great movements left him indifferent. Of politics he was weary, and had lived long enough to see history repeat itself fruitlessly. War he resented as an anachronism in the twentieth century. It puzzled him that the cream of any nation's brains so swiftly sank to force as the sole solution of international difficulties. He was a little inclined to be a pessimist before the spectacle of mankind, though with respect to individual man he ever took a sanguine view.

To-night this latter fact was rendered more than usually apparent, for there had wakened in George Easterbrook an enthusiasm, and his family already perceived it.

They sat in their parlour, and Joanna waited with a Sunday journal spread before her until her father should bid her begin to read. Instead, however, he talked.

"I haven't had such a keen boy through my hands since William Godbeer's brother was here.

And there's more in this chap than him. There's a light in his eye, and that always means something."

Paul Pitts was drawing under the rays of an oil-lamp upon the table. He had a bunch of purple sloes on crooked blackthorn twigs, and was considering its possibilities.

"That light don't always mean a good thing, however. You'll do well to wait and watch a bit, George."

"Why, of course. But there's a good light and a bad light; and I claim for myself that I can read one from t'other. Mark me, that youngster will do something—here or elsewhere. For the minute, so far as one can judge, he's very anxious to learn and to please."

"What did you think of him, Joanna?" asked Mr. Pitts.

"He's got a very clever face, and a very good-looking one," said Joanna. "And a very quick voice."

"He's a learner and a trier."

"And by all accounts he's also a liar," said Mr. Pitts.

But Easterbrook would not allow this.

"That's open to question," he said. "'Tis only one boy's word against another. He was a bit too smart for the other boys, anyway."

"They thought you'd sack him when you saw him on the tower, and the wonder is you didn't."

"That's right, Paul; but he made a good case. It would have been to strain fairness to send him going on that. He may be a liar, or he may not. Time will prove it, no doubt."

The artist did not look up from his work, but he said a startling thing.

"That newspaper in Joanna's hand will prove it, I'm afraid, George."

"What d'you mean?"

"I read it after dinner. But I didn't want to spoil your supper. You read out that bit headed, 'Runaway Caught,' Joanna. Mind you, I've no quarrel with Porter, or anybody else. Only you must go ahead with your eyes open, George; not with them shut."

Mr. Easterbrook stared. Then he put his pipe on the mantelshelf and stood in front of the fire, with his hands in his pockets. Joanna opened the paper, and soon found the paragraph. But before she read it, Paul Pitts spoke again.

"You know me. I'm not one to put two and two together, if I'm like to hurt anybody by doing so. This is no business of mine. I haven't spoken a word to the boy, and don't harbour anything but kindness to him. But there's nothing like knowing where you stand with boy or man."

"Read," said Easterbrook; "then we'll see what's the matter. If there's no more to it than a certain boy's run from a workhouse, then we shan't learn nothing that we didn't know before. But it can't be that."

Pitts did not reply, and the girl read:

"RUNAWAY CAUGHT.

"REFORMATORY BOY TELLS OF HIS ADVENTURES.

"Arthur Jones, alias Shepherd, one of the two lads who escaped from Walton Reformatory a

week ago, has been recaptured at Wellington, in Somerset; but his companion is not yet reported. Lee Hockin, the other culprit, was responsible for the adventure, and planned the escape. The boys were dissatisfied with the monotony of their daily tasks at the institution, and felt it an insult to their ability to be put upon such mean work. They also objected to the food. Jones declares that neither had any complaint against the superintendent or staff, but both felt 'full up' with their dismal life, and sought to better it. They decided to abscond in their grey clothes, and did so without difficulty; but when once clear of the Reformatory, they agreed to part and pursue different roads. Hockin went west, and Jones, who had friends in Somerset, endeavoured to reach them. He describes how he tramped over hundreds of fields by night, how he had lived on apples and crusts, begged from tramps for two days, and how, finally, he found work at a brickfield near Poole.

" 'I got a shilling a day,' he said, 'and that was a bit of a jump from twopence a day at the Reformatory.' He laid rough by the kilns for a night or two, and was about to seek out his friends at Wellington, when the foreman detected him, and perceived that 'Shepherd' was none other than the runaway Jones, from Walton Reformatory. Inspector White and a constable quickly appeared at the brick-works; whereupon Jones owned up. He will be brought before the Walton Bench next week on the charge of breaking out of the Reformatory. His friend has been more suc-

cessful, and no report of his adventures is chronicled."

Joanna ceased, and stole a look at her father. He did not speak, but struck a match and lit his pipe again.

The sharp quaver of Miss Medway broke the silence. She sat by the fire doing nothing, as her custom was on Sunday in winter.

"If that's not your Harvey Porter, who is it, neph^y George?"

Still Mr. Easterbrook was silent, and his friend spoke.

"There's a good bit of difference between a workhouse and a reformatory, George. You don't get into a reformatory by accident."

"You may," answered Easterbrook.

Miss Medway exhibited impatience.

"You're daft about the boy," she said.

"Not a bit of it, Aunt Sophy. You know my opinions as to how a young person's surroundings will influence his life. If a workhouse is bad, how much more is a reformatory bad? I didn't blame him for showing his manhood and running away from a workhouse; and why should I blame him for running away from a reformatory?"

The old woman spoke again:

"You do amaze me! Are you going weak in your head at your time of life? A man like you, who can see as far through a brick wall as any man! If you ask me, the question ain't the manhood that made him run away from the reformatory, but the wickedness that got him into it. If he's what you think him, and as good as gold, or

better, then how comes it they put him away? He's been wicked, whatever he may be now; and the question for you ain't whether you think he's a clever sort of boy, but whether you're doing your duty honest and straight by helping him to break the law."

Easterbrook looked at his aunt without friendliness.

"You put it very clear, my old dear," he said. "But perhaps you find yourself too cross and too much in a hurry to judge."

"I'm not cross, and I'm not judging you, and I'm not judging him," answered Miss Medway. "I'm only saying that if this is true, I shouldn't trust him farther than you can see him, for 'tis very well known that to take a hungry young snake out of the gutter, and warm it, and feed it, is a very doubtful thing to do."

"I shall go to the bottom of it, you may be sure. I'm not noted for mistakes in matters like this. Least said soonest mended for the minute."

"It may not be Harvey Porter, after all," ventured Joanna. "Why do you think it must be he, Uncle Paul?"

"Just a feeling," answered Mr. Pitts—"just a feeling, same as your father gets feelings so often. He can't tell you how, or why, but he knows they're right. Intuition is the word. Father's 'Harvey Porter' is the reformatory's Lee Hockin. I know it, and, what's more, father knows it—don't you, George?"

"No," answered the master. "I wouldn't say I knew it, Paul, though I do say it looks very likely. But I go farther, and say I don't blame the

boy for running away from a place where he can only make twopence a day. Seventeen years old, and only good for that! That's wrong. There's only some questions to ask that I can see, and he won't lie again, whatever he may have done before; because it wouldn't pay him. I'm saying this just as if I didn't know anything about him or his character, but I do; and what I know makes it very clear to me that I've got to hear both sides of this story before I make up my mind to send him off. Very likely I shall dismiss him, and very likely I shan't."

"He's bewitched you!" declared Sophia Medway.

"Another thing," added Paul Pitts. "You must think of your own credit, George. Suppose if you didn't give him up, somebody else did?"

"Who would? He's got the trick to make friends. They all like him."

Pitts laughed quietly.

"To think of you standing between the State and its lawful prey!" he said. "Such a man for law and order as you!"

"I'll take the responsibility," answered Easterbrook. "The State is blind and deaf and dumb. I grant that big things must be done in a big manner, and the State has no time to study character, or make allowances for the particular case. The State has got to tackle man in the lump, and make laws and ordinances, and punish if they are broken; but between man and his fellow-man the case is altered, and I'll warrant that many a judge who has sentenced a sinner to penal servitude, or the gallows, would have let him off, as man to

man, if it had been in his power so to do. And so it is with me and this boy. There's that in him I value—a great power of doing and understanding. The reformatory's no place for such a nature, and I'll go farther, and doubt, when we get to the bottom of it, if they ever ought to have sent him there."

"You're in a cleft stick so far as that goes," answered Pitts. "He's got you if he likes to lie to you. Because, if you doubt his story, you can't prove your doubts without making inquiries; and when they know where he is, they'll want him back."

Easterbrook's face clouded.

"I'm sorry you're against him, Paul," he said. "'Tisn't like you—ever gentle to man or mouse—to be so quick to think against a defenceless boy."

"Nay—nay, I wouldn't do that," answered the other. "I'm only pointing out—"

"Nothing I don't know. But the natural bent of my mind is to side with those that are down. He's lied—that's pretty clear. But I don't say, 'once a liar, always a liar.' Perhaps more boys come out of reformatories liars than went into 'em liars. Perhaps so—perhaps not. We'll be fair, and leave it at that till we see what to-morrow brings forth."

He left the room, and his aunt spoke.

"This ain't going to stop here," she said. "You know how he sees a thing through to the bitter end."

"But never was a man more willing to own himself in the wrong," answered Paul.

Miss Medway denied this, however, and shook her head vigorously.

"I won't grant him that at all," she said. "He's so seldom in the wrong that when he is, he can't believe it. 'Tisn't vanity makes him doubt his own senses when that happens, but simple experience. However, there's never any doubt about a boy. The wretches always make themselves pretty clear for good or evil."

"George puts reason above all things, so no doubt his reason will soon come to his rescue," foretold Mr. Pitts. "If the boy's a bad boy, he'll find it out; and if he's a good boy, 'twill only be one more feather in your nephew's cap. He's very clever at human nature, as we all know."

"Just because he comes to people cool and collected, and in his right mind," answered Easterbrook's aunt. "Then he shines, because he don't let things influence him, for or against, and looks through a character, same as we look through a window. But it's been different from the first with this youth. Did you ever hear him chatter about a boy before? 'Tis outside his character to be so interested in a vagabond boy, and to read virtues in the turn of his eyelashes. I hope the boy will bitch it up to-morrow, and be sent going."

"I wouldn't wish that. He may be a very proper boy, only wanting such a strong hand as George's to lift him and make a fine man of him."

But Sophia Medway would not take a hopeful view.

"It wouldn't have been in the power of a harmless, good sort of boy to interest him so much," she declared. "'Tis the devil in the boy that's

humbugged George. There's nothing I trust less than cleverness in a boy, for there's nothing tempts boy or man to be dishonest like cleverness does. They know that their brains put 'em a head and shoulders over other people, and human nature's that tricky, that when anybody finds out that he's cleverer than the rest, he's terrible tempted to profit by the knowledge."

CHAPTER IX

THE TRUTH

Now the newcomer took his place in the dinner-hour and was suffered to sit with Punchard, Tolley, William Godbeer the turner, Thomas Body the thrower, and other men, within the radius of heat and light struck out by the furnace fires.

His humour pleased them, and those with whom he came in contact perceived that he was very willing to please.

“And what might you think of the business so far, Porter?” asked Mr. Body. “ ’Tis always an interesting thing to see how the meaning of clay strikes on a young boy. Some take it in a proper spirit and it sobers them and lifts ’em to reasonable creatures, and some again, like that bird-witted thing, Jack Ede, feel no more about it than if they was handling sugar or corn.”

Every crease in Mr. Body’s clothes was full of clay, and every crease on his face and neck was pencilled with it.

“Wedging brings up the muscles on your arms,” said Porter. “But I’m full up with that. I want to follow the clay upstairs and see it when it comes to you, Mr. Body.”

“The clay knows me,” declared the old man. “It may seem strange to you to hear me say that; but after all these countless years I’ve got to the

root of the mystery, and I may tell you there's a soul in clay. And who puts it there? The thrower! When the soul goes into a human creature is a nice question and none here can answer it, but when the soul goes into a pot can be answered. 'Tis after the clay's thrown on the wheel. Then the hands of the potter put the soul in and, for good or ill, the clay takes shape and fulfils its purpose. It can't talk like you or me, but to such a hand as mine it can speak. 'Tis a language only a generation of years at the wheel will teach you; but I know it. The clay talks to me, and I talk back to the clay."

This extraordinary speech interested nobody but Porter himself. A man or two exchanged glances, but none exhibited particular astonishment, for Mr. Body's peculiarities of mind were familiar; he grew more outrageous in his utterance and more absorbed and obsessed by his medium. It was thought better for his unsettled intellect to agree with him than differ; but the boy who listened as yet knew not of the thrower's psychological insecurity, and laughed at Mr. Body's assertion.

"I should like to see a lump of clay talking to you, sir," he said. "And, better still, I should like to see you talking to a lump of clay."

"No doubt you will do so," answered the old man. "Anybody can see it, but not anybody can understand it; and as you laugh like an idiot, boy, no doubt you'd get nothing out of it."

"Come to think, clay can talk to the potter, after all," declared Mr. Godbeer. "Don't clay talk to the Potter every time a Christian man goes

on his knees to Heaven; and don't the Potter talk to clay every time a man's prayer is answered?"

"No sermons, William; I can't have 'em down here whatever you do overhead," said Mr. Punchard. "All this talk about men being clay is nonsense and stuff in my opinion, and a very low view to take. Clay be clay and human flesh is human flesh; and though you and me have been friends for a quarter of a century, Thomas, I will say that when you talk about putting a soul into a teapot you're going too far, ain't 'e, Tolley?"

Tolley had his mouth full and nodded, while Mr. Body, who cared little for food but much for his own muddled metaphysics, thrust a basin into Porter's hand and turned to Punchard.

"You can eat up that, Harvey Porter, and you can use your ears while you do it, for if you're going to be a worker in clay, then the better you understand it from the first, the more useful you will like to be, and the higher you will rise. Punchard here talks about the soul of a teapot, and that sounds bad. He's no Christian, as we all know, and none the better for that; but to talk about the soul of a teapot is meant rudely: he might just so soon talk about the soul of a pepper-pot, or the soul of those comical cats and pigs that Mr. Pitts turns out in his lighter moments."

"'Tis your own word, Thomas," answered the fireman. "You say you put the soul into the clay with your fingers, and so when you make a teapot, I suppose you put a soul in it."

"If you ask me," declared the "handler," Rupert Marsland, "I put the soul in when I put on the handle."

"Or you might say Miss Easterbrook does, when she paints the teapot," chimed in William Godbeer.

"And Timothy Coysh here will say that the soul goes in when the spout goes on, won't you, Timothy?"

"No," answered the round and genial Coysh. "I'll say nothing of the sort. It takes me all my time to look after my own immortal soul. 'Tis a very fantastical idea of Tom Body's, and it won't stand looking into, for why? What becomes of the soul of the teapot when it's scat? I don't suppose even Body here would pretend a teapot goes to heaven."

"Is there angel teapots and devil teapots, Mr. Body?" asked Jack Ede, and the thrower shook his head impatiently.

"You're a lot of empty creatures—empty, earthy creatures all," he declared. "Sometimes you seem to me no better than mud yourselves, for you're hardly worthy to be called clay."

"I'll tell you when the soul goes into a teapot," said Porter, handing his dish to Mr. Body. "'Tis when the tea goes in and the boiling water. How will that do, sir?"

The rest laughed, and Punchard praised the speaker; but Body burst out again. He was, however, more incoherent than before, and strove to put his own vain imaginings into speech. But he could not, for he lacked words with which to present his nebulous ideas. Perhaps, indeed, there were no words that could interpret him. He presented the solemn spectacle of a mind tottering on the brink. Daily a wider gap was yawning

between him and reason; but as yet it only appeared in flashes of broken thought and a perversion of view that sometimes puzzled and sometimes amused his fellows. The dark cloud that hung over him had not as yet touched his hands, lessened their cunning, or turned them from their appointed task.

"I haven't got the tongue to put things before the likes of you," declared Mr. Body. "There's a gulf fixed between your minds and mine. You'll get to understand the clay before you can understand me, and if you saw into the clay as I do, then it would make itself clear to you, same as it does to me."

"No doubt you can say to yourself a thing is as clear as mud and mean it," said the second thrower, Zachary. "But to us common men, clay is only clay."

"You're young, Adam Zachary," returned the thrower, "and while I speak from the fulness of the heart, you answer from the emptiness of the head—a common fault with the likes of you. When I speak of a soul in the clay, I don't mean in one piece more than another, and I wouldn't draw it down to a teapot body, or a batch of teapot bodies. I mean that the clay is nought till it has been touched by the hand of the potter, and the clay knows it. There's a moment comes when the potter battles with the clay and the clay battles with the potter. And then the thing, that a moment before was only a lump of good red earth, is a lump no more, but a shapely creation made for use or beauty—a creature to take its place in the world out of which it came,

and to do its little share of the world's work, and help man's lower needs, or minister to his higher senses, as the case may be. And to help the clay to do that is our privilege and blessing; and in return it does a great deal for the man who ministers to it. And 'tis in that sense, I say, we lift up the clay and put a soul in it, just like God Almighty lifts up our clay and puts a soul in that. And if your wits are too slow to see my meaning, I'm sorry for you, because your shortcomings will make against the success of the clay you work in."

"We see what you mean, Thomas, and 'tis a great thought," declared Mr. Godbeer. "We ought to take off our hats to the clay," he continued, "and certain it is that we've often took off our hats to clay that wasn't half so honest as what we work in here."

"You catch my meaning, William," replied Thomas Body. "We ought to come to the clay with religious feeling in our hearts—that's what I stand out for. We make our work one thing and our prayer another; but they ought to be the same thing. Your work ought to be your daily prayer, and if it is, you'll find the Lord's ever swift to answer it. I pray at the wheel, and William prays at the lathe, and——"

"Leave it there, Thomas," advised Mr. Godbeer. "That's a very clever thought, and, like many of your thoughts, had better be left to stand alone."

"And I pray at the oven," said Mr. Punchard, "and Jeremiah Tolley prays at the steam-engine, though from what I've overheard him saying to

himself sometimes, I'd never have thought it; and Timothy Coysh——”

“You shut your mouth, you godless old bird!” cried Mr. Body, who was now in great good temper at Godbeer's support. “We don't want to hear you; though how you, that sweat in yonder heat half your life, never think on the fire that dieth not, is a puzzle to me.”

Then came Jack Ede's elder brother, Christopher, with a message. He was an “oven-placer,” and his sole work was to pack the ovens with the thousands of pieces that went to a baking. But now he came to tell Harvey Porter that Mr. Easterbrook wanted him in the office.

“ 'Twill be a lift, I hope, Harvey,” said Jeremiah. “I've spoke for you, and given a very good account of you.”

“Thank you kindly, Mr. Tolley,” said the boy, and hastened away.

They spoke of him when he was gone, and wished him well. There was that in him that had struck the least observant—a power of understanding, a certain charm of manner and a desire to please.

But Easterbrook wasted no time, and from his first question, which was put without preliminary welcome, Porter saw himself faced with overwhelming disaster.

“What's your real name?” inquired the master. His face was inscrutable, and told the boy nothing; nor did he in response betray his own fears, save by quickening of pulses unseen. His mind moved very swiftly, but he had little time for thought. For a thousand reasons he desired to

propitiate the man before him, and some of these reasons were not selfish. Mixed motives animated him—the dread of loss, the danger of making a fatal error. No sense of right decided him, but a swift intuition that truth, though often of doubtful efficacy, would be his only chance now. The danger of another lie impressed him forcibly, for Easterbrook hated lying. He feared, indeed, that there was no hope, since his first lie had come home; but he longed with a great longing to win the master if he might; there had risen in his young and devious heart an honest admiration for Easterbrook. To be cast out now, when he knew that he stood in the way to win a fine man's friendship, dismayed him, and no sordid or personal consideration was responsible for the emotion.

For three seconds the boy hesitated; then he told the truth:

“Lee Hockin, sir.”

“Why did you tell me a double lie?”

“You know, sir.”

This answer silenced Easterbrook for a moment.

“I do not know,” he answered presently.

“If I'd told you the truth, you would have given me to the police, and I should have gone back to that cursed place. You've heard something or read something. I saw it in Mr. Tolley's paper yesterday. I'm the boy that ran away from the reformatory.”

“And did you think to begin your life on a lie?”

“No, sir. I meant to tell you, so soon as ever

I'd got you to feel kindly to me. If I'd told you straight, it would have been all up, of course. It was life or death to me if you let me stop, or turned me away."

"Boys don't get sent to the reformatory for nothing."

"A very little will do it, sir. There were boys there who hadn't done much."

"What were you there for?"

This was the vital question, and the culprit, anticipating it, had already considered his answer. He told the truth:

"My father and mother are dead, sir, and I used to live with my mother's sister at Exeter. I was the leader of six boys. We'd read a lot of stories in the papers, and thought to be like the chaps in the stories. We were just up for making our mark in Exeter. I was fifteen, and the youngest of the band was twelve. We were errand-boys, and when off duty did what we could to shake up Exeter. We worked hard and succeeded pretty well. We had names out of the penny stories. I was called 'Fly-by-night,' and my second in command was called 'The Great Unknown.' They caught him stealing hot potatoes off a stall. They offered him to go into the Royal Navy, and he went. Then when I was sixteen, a young policeman got a down on me, and he caught me doing nothing and beat me bad, just for his own satisfaction. He hadn't no right to do it, and I got back on him and went one night and broke all the windows of his house when he was on his beat a long way off. It couldn't have been proved against me; but one of my band had done what I

thought was wrong, and killed an old woman's pet cat, and he was in disgrace and wanted to be evens with me. And he went to the policeman and gave me away. Then they sent me to the reformatory for five years."

"What did your aunt say?"

"She thanked her God, and hoped that she'd be dead and in her grave before I came out again."

Easterbrook looked at the boy curiously.

"You can tell the truth as easily as anybody when you like, it seems."

"I've done with lies. I've been at that place for nearly two years, and I'd rather drown myself than go back. You can prove every word I've told you, master. I want to go straight. If any man can make me go straight, you can. I put myself on your mercy. It's up to you now. I'll do what you tell me."

"If I tell you to go back to the reformatory and serve your time, and then come back to me?"

"I'll go back; but three more years of it will make me a bad 'un for evermore."

"Have any of the men linked up your name with the runaway, Lee Hockin?"

"No, sir."

"Is your aunt living?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Why did she feel so thankful to be rid of you?"

"She didn't like my father, and she didn't like me."

"What was your father?"

"A longshore man at Sidmouth. He worked

boats, and he was drowned in a squall. Then my mother came to Exeter and lived with my aunt, who was her widowed sister. I was eight years old then. My mother might have married a green-grocer, but she didn't. She took up with a gentleman—a toff—who had known her at Sidmouth before she married father. He sent from London, and she went there to him, and never came back. But my aunt kept me."

"You say your mother is dead?"

"Seven years later we heard from a hospital that she'd been took in there run over, and died two hours after. And they traced her out to a room where she lived. But she hadn't no friends then. My aunt's called Sarah Parsons. She lives in the St. Thomas's part of Exeter. That ring on my finger is my mother's wedding-ring. My aunt let me have it, and I never got rid of it. I thought it might be a mascot to me some day."

To another listener than Easterbrook, it might have seemed that art—extraordinary art for a boy of seventeen—was woven into this narrative. Every point told. But the man who heard made no effort to discount the story or judge it as a calculated production. He knew it was true, even as he had known that earlier statements from the same lips were false. He could even marvel at himself. The boy's eyes fascinated him. Some affinity, sprung from subtle secrets of character far beyond Easterbrook's power to trace or measure, made his heart yearn upon the boy. The warnings, dimly heard before, were now trumpet loud and uttered in the lad's own voice. But they were warnings no more. They had changed since

they were brought into the light. Their vague form and doubtful import vanished, and to the man's mind, seen in their exact proportions, they shrank. He believed that he knew the worst, and in so far as the past was concerned, he did. The future held no terrors for him, because he put his whole trust in environment and not heredity. Only his own conduct remained to be considered and his duty to his own conscience. Upon that great question Easterbrook felt unable to decide in a moment. His decision was really made, but he did not appreciate the fact, and fancied that he must take four-and-twenty hours to come at it.

"Go till to-morrow," he said, breaking a silence. "Work, and keep your mouth shut. Your secrets are safe with me."

Porter stared at him, and, had Easterbrook known her, he might have seen the boy's mother looking out of his eyes.

"I'd die for you!" he said quietly.

Then he went out.

CHAPTER X

A POTTER'S WHEEL

IN the course of the following week, Porter—whose real name was buried in the knowledge of four persons only at Brunel's Tower—received permission to climb a flight of steps up which he had often cast longing glances. From the wedging-table the clay was carried straight to the potting-room, and now Harvey shared this work with other lads. He ascended, bearing a load of perfected clay, and found himself in a large and lofty chamber full of air and light, illuminated on the north and west by tall windows, and having white-washed walls. In the midst were ranges of open shelves to support the six-foot boards, and round about stood potters' wheels and turning-lathes. Men came and went, boys hastened hither and thither, and the hum of Mr. Tolley's steam-engine ascended through the open flooring. For two lathes and two wheels were worked by steam, the power controlled by the potters' and the turners' feet. But Thomas Body sat apart at the string-wheel, and a boy supplied the motive power for him. He made the large pieces, and while beside the younger man spread hundreds of lesser things turned by their swift hands from the spinning clay, on Body's board rose varied vases that

obeyed no gauge, but budded and blossomed to his will.

Red was the note of this great room. It had become ingrained upon the floor and ascended up the whitewashed walls. It had splashed and smeared everywhere for years, and now extended like a coat of genial paint over all things. Visible from the windows there spread the red earth, too, in many a bright billow at time of spring; and the fallow changed gradually through the seasons by passages of green and amber and gold to the harvest and the stubble. Or it bore roots by rotation, then turned to pasture for a season, and with the flying years was ploughed again. Above the hills rose woods, for Brunel's Tower stood at the heart of the green vales of Tor Mohun, and such surroundings, in their sleepy peace and plenty, unconsciously influenced those who worked amid them. Some of contemplative mind, as William Godbeer, appreciated this environment, and often, looking from their labours to the lush valleys and vernal joy or autumn splendour of the trees, felt that their lot was cast in a kindly place; to others the fact, while unappreciated, none the less played a part to influence character and effect the manners and the mind in one direction, even as the storm and stress amid cheerless theatres of toil at the heart of industrial districts are calculated to mould in another.

Porter was told to prepare his lump of clay for Mr. Body, and with a weight and scales he separated his mass into lesser masses, each weighing three pounds. These balls he ranged before the

potter, and was permitted for a while to watch the magic business.

A little shining wheel of steel stood in a basin thickly spattered with red mud, and beside the thrower were the few tools that he used—prickers, callipers, drill, and sponge. Within reach of his hand also were ribs of slate and tin—modelled for the inside and outside of the pot—and a wire with which he cut the finished piece from the wheel. Beside him, in the trough where his wheel spun, stood a bowl of water coloured to redness.

Another perpendicular wheel more than six feet high stood close at hand, and made Charlie Coysh, who turned it, look small. Its great revolution and steady progress were more fitted to master work than the steam-driven wheels, and it escaped their vibration.

Mr. Body sat like a king on his throne. He was red to the eyes. He wore a great apron, and his sleeves were turned up to the elbows. His hands and arms shone with wet redness; his grey beard was spattered. Now he threw a lump of clay, pressed it sharply on the eye of the wheel, and crouched and cuddled over it like a beast over a bone. His hands seemed to merge in the lump as he gripped it, and set his wrists, arms, and shoulders to the work.

“That's called ‘truing the ball,’ ” he explained; “but I call it ‘taming the ball.’ ”

Charlie turned fast, the potter's wheel whirled, and for a moment the clay spluttered and fought, as it seemed, while Mr. Body, with his face bent near enough to catch the splashes, laughed.

"'Tis the last struggle to be free!" he said; "the untamed clay fights the potter like that, just for a moment, till he feels the grip grows tight on him and he knows he's met his master. But don't you think anybody can beat him. If you was sitting here, he'd fight and beat you again and again." In an instant the lump was steadied, dragged up to a cone, and pressed down again to a ball that every bubble of air might be expelled and the whole welded to an obedient mass.

"Now it's tame and broken," said the potter, "and in go my thumbs."

He began to model.

"You see the piece in your mind's eye first and work according," he said. "You see it standing before you as clear as those vases on that board. A man like Mr. Easterbrook can build a model as he goes, and turns his fancies into clay as they come into his head; and he's told me that often and often he'll dream a pot finer than any that ever he's thrown and come red hot to the wheel to make it; but the dream's gone, and he can't turn it into a living pot. Now I'm building a vase."

His thumbs were hollowing the heart of the clay, and he began to lift it. It rose to his touch, rounded, hollowed, billowed magically, expanded here to the belly of the vase, narrowed above to its neck, then opened again like a blossoming flower, and turned over daintily to make the lip. The clay revolved, fast at first, slower as the piece came near its finishing, for the boy at the big string-wheel watched its progress and worked at his handle accordingly. Body's shining red hands hovered, darted, turned and twisted, touched and

pressed. They were never still for an instant. Round the pot and into it they went, now suffering the thin clay lip to run between his fingers, now taking the whole palm to the face, now working within, and all the while slowly and subtly lifting the clay to its limits. He talked while he worked.

"There's things a potter can tell, and there's things he cannot," he said; "and one thing that you cannot is how you know the clay's drawn up to its fulness, and running as thin as you dare to let it. To know when to stop when you're potting like this without gauges is an instinct; but them that don't find it come quick to them, will never make potters."

The vase reached completion, and a glistening thread of light, fine as a gossamer, ascended on its rounded breast—the tiny rising of the clay between the potter's fingers.

"'Tis done!" said Mr. Body. Then the wheel grew still; he took his wire, cut the pot away, and lifted it carefully to its place on the board beside him.

"'Twill dry a while below, and then come back again to Mr. Godbeer," explained the old man. "Such work as this goes to him, and he smoothes and fines and takes my meaning with all his cleverness, and puts the finishing touch to the shape; but the master's pots never have touch of lathe upon them. He won't suffer it, for he hateth the lathe. It kills out the soul and spirit of a piece, in his opinion, and makes all pots equal—like the Socialists would have all men. But the paying public like for all to be suent and finished, and the

shop-people know it: That's where Mr. Easterbrook's different from common men. He'd sooner see what you might call a great pot, even if it was flawed or faulty, than just a common everyday thing like these I'm making."

He was at work again repeating the former process phase by phase in each particular. Another ball was trued, lifted, rounded into shape; again he crouched to his work, and his face shone through the spatter of red.

"I've made countless thousands of pots, great and small, useful and beautiful," he said, "but the same feeling goes to each. It never palls on me like it do on most. I come to each like a learner, as religious people go before God Almighty."

He worshipped indeed—the holy spirit that to his understanding dwelt in all clay.

Porter was itching to sit in the potter's seat and find what the clay felt like on the wheel. To him the stuff had only been heavy, inert, and dead; but the potter's enthusiasm fired him. He perceived swiftly enough that from the rotation of the wheel it took a lease of life and ceased to be the amorphous and weighty earth with which he had toiled and which had wearied him daily thus far. He did not, however, dare to ask permission, but guessed he might experiment some day in the dinner-hour, with Charlie to turn the wheel.

"Have you ever made a great pot, sir?" he asked.

"I have and I have not," answered Thomas Body. "Of course, I can copy a great pot, and in that sense I've made them when the need arose; but I've never made what the master would call a

great pot out of my head—only out of my hands. That may be too deep for you to understand at your time of life."

"I understand. 'Tis only your great craftsmanship, no doubt, that makes you such a wonderful man, sir."

Body was pleased.

"There's great and small working in the house of the clay," he said. "I'm not the least, though a long way short of the greatest; but I have my appointed place, young boy, and that place I fill, and I hope when the time comes that the clay will be able to feel you've served it as faithfully as me. Now set about it, for I'll be calling out for more in a minute."

Porter obeyed, and then availed himself of permission to watch the other potters at the steam-driven wheels. One was young and clever. He promised to attain excellence, but fate had thrown away a natural gift, for he was lazy and without ambition. He was making egg-cups, and drawing them magically one after another out of the top of a great cone of white clay that spun upon his wheel. His work, which seemed a conjuring trick repeated every forty seconds, fascinated Porter.

The other potter was Adam Zachary, the second thrower, and his heart was eaten up with ambitions. From under dark eyebrows Adam often looked across at the string-wheel, where Body worked, and wished him away. His skill was as great as Body's, and his touch more delicate. Body's mind, moreover, obviously began to fail, and Zachary longed for the day when he would

vanish and the string-wheel command his service no more; for he felt that it was time that he should be working at it. Body cumbered the earth, in his opinion, and stood between him and preferment. Therefore, he was quick to note any lapse in his labour, and to point out any failure of coherence in his speech. He made no attempt to winnow out the grain that often hid under the whirling chaff of Body's words; but set all down alike to gathering madness, and watched and waited for his end. There was more malignity in this man's eyes than his mind, but the expression that he cast across at old Thomas was not observed by his neighbours, and he hid his heart for decency.

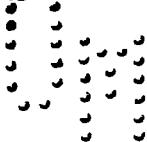
William Godbeer saluted Porter with friendship.

"When are you coming to have a look at a lathe?" he asked, and the boy answered civilly:

"Soon, if you please, Mr. Godbeer. But I've been gathering in such a terrible lot of learning since I was allowed up here that I daren't tackle any more. If I do, I'll be safe to mix it up and spoil it. But I'm sure your work's as interesting as the thrower's work, and I hope you won't think it was rude of me not to come to you sooner."

Godbeer laughed.

"Civil words cost nothing, and you're full of 'em, seemingly. And so much the better, for civil words breed friends. No, I wouldn't say my work is as interesting as the wheel; but some find it more to their taste, and their skill lies at it. If you show yourself worthy and the master ordains



that you stop, he'll give you the chance to see what you're best fitted for. There's no round pegs in square holes here. 'Tis his way to fit each to the thing he can do best."

CHAPTER XI

SINISTER

PORTER proceeded blamelessly for the space of ten weeks. Easterbrook continued to hear good accounts of him, and after the Christmas holidays his sphere was a little extended. More than once he visited the potters' room, and then an accident enabled him to attempt fresh work. But the accident was of his own making. He did evil in secret, and reaped an open advantage. His wrong-doing was not planned to advance his own welfare—pure revenge inspired it; but in the sequel the thing he did brought harm where it was not intended, and opened the door to promotion for himself.

It happened that in some interchange of jests with Jack Ede during a dinner-hour, the newcomer, whose tongue was sharper than Jack's, awoke laughter at the expense of his elder. Ede had been declared by Mr. Coysh a failure at the important business of the teapot-spouts, and for the moment he was carrying six-foot boards to and from the ovens, for his shoulders were broad and his hand and eye steady. He could bring a board laden with a hundred little pieces of ware from the store-shops to the kilns, and carry his delicate loads up or down the wooden flights of

stairs, and round the corners from one chamber to another.

Now priding himself unduly on this simple accomplishment, Porter chaffed him, and since no better answer occurred to Jack, he rose in anger, and smote Harvey full upon the chest. The lad sat on the coals eating his meal from a little tin that he had bought, and now the food was spilled and the boy knocked backward roughly over the coals, and fouled and bruised.

The laugh was then with Ede, and Porter, knowing himself quite powerless to retaliate upon the young giant, picked himself up as best he might, sucked the blood off a cut hand, and laughed at himself as loudly as anybody. He went home hungry that day, and nursed his secret wrath to keep it warm. His revenge might have killed Ede, but he never paused to consider the possibility of that. It flashed full-fledged to his quick mind, and he followed the promptings and set a trap.

Up and down the main stair Jack came and went a hundred times a day with his load upon his shoulder, and his movements were so regular that it was possible to time them accurately. At the top of the stairs, however, opened a place of storage—rooms ill-lighted and usually empty of men. Porter found that he could turn a cord round the leg of a wooden pillar here, and, entirely secreted, hold the other end behind the angle of a wall that separated this store from the next. A cord was easily hidden in the place itself, and having hatched his plot nothing was needed but the nerve to carry it out. This he did not lack. He waited until dusk, when the passages and chambers were



growing dark, and only a glow of red light ascended from the furnaces beneath. Then, half a minute before Jack Ede would appear with a laden board, he ran his string round the pillar, and took the two ends in his hand behind the corner of an adjacent wall. The double cord now stretched straight across the top of the stairs four inches from the ground, and no human power could save Ede when he approached with his loaded board to descend the steps. His foot caught, his centre of gravity was upset, he clutched at the rope beside the steps, missed it, and fell headlong down. In a second Porter wound up his string, and hastened to another part of the building. No reasoning could now connect him with the catastrophe, and no wit find a shadow of proof to associate him with it.

The crash he heard—the mingled cries of two men and the smash of broken crockery; but it was not until he had skirted another chamber or two and descended by the stairs in the engine-house that he learned the result of his blackguardism. Jack Ede, happily for himself, unfortunately for another, had fallen upon a second man, who was just ascending the stairs as he prepared to descend. Head first he had shot into Christopher Ede, his own brother, a “placer”; and while Jack thus escaped with nothing but a flesh wound down his thigh and a broken finger, poor Christopher, borne backward and flung headlong on the hard floor received more severe injuries. The back of his head was cut by the shiver of biscuit crockery that descended with him; his shoulder-blade and his left wrist were both broken, and when picked

up he was unconscious, and so remained for six hours.

Thus it happened that Christopher Ede, a harmless and kindly man, received the full force of Porter's revenge, and his brother escaped lightly. As for Jack, he was bewildered and utterly at a loss to know how the accident overtook him. He could only swear that he felt something trip him at the top of the stairs; but since examination revealed nothing, and the possibility of foul play never entered into any calculation, he was merely credited with clumsiness—a failing that too certainly belonged to him.

He was not the worse for his adventure, but his brother went into hospital, and Porter, benumbed and secretly stricken to find how his rascality had struck the wrong man, soon forgot his regret to learn that he was to be tried in Christopher's place. He had watched Christopher Ede not seldom, and marked, with his curious genius for essentials, the prime considerations for "a placer."

Every piece is subjected to two firings, and an oven usually contains not only biscuit-ware, which has already been baked once and now returns from the glazer's ready for the final ordeal, but also earthenware prepared for the first firing. The latter pieces do not require such very careful manipulation. They stand shoulder to shoulder on the batts of fireproof brick that are built up layer on layer in the ovens to support them; but the biscuit-ware is glazed, and the glaze will presently melt and run all over the pot to coat the whole with a layer of shining glass, and bring out the colours lying dim and dull beneath it. Each

piece of biscuit requires to be supported above the batt, otherwise it would be sealed thereto in firing by the melted glaze, and under each piece therefore stands the "stilts"—little tripods of special fireproof clay that lift the pot from the batt, and merely touch it at three sharp points. The placer packs each layer of batts, and every piece of the thousands that may represent one baking must be set accurately upon its stilts, and come as near the next piece as possible without touching it. The unbaked clay demands only less exact arrangement, but since stilts are not needed for its disposition, a placer proceeds more quickly with its packing. Porter knew very well that such labour, skilled though it might be, was beneath him; but his purpose was to show as swiftly as possible the nature of his gifts, and he hailed the opportunity to do so. Every thought and energy he poured into the business, and placed the oven as though his life depended on it. Remorse for his crime hardly scratched his heart. He only regretted that the wrong man had suffered most, and in the light of his own opportunity, even the disaster to Christopher troubled him but little. He soon forgot it.

Beginning at the back of the oven—a tunnel erected in the form of a gothic arch—Porter set his pieces and packed his batts, built up his ware, and worked in board after board of crockery as they were brought to him. Jack Ede brought the ware to the oven, and, little dreaming what chance had set Porter to fill his brother's place, gave kindly hints and helped the boy as he could. But the new placer needed no hints. He had stored

the whole craft of the process in his head, and even to the manipulation needed for picking five small pieces from the board at once and transferring them to the batt, he had nothing to learn. The primary demands upon him he fully understood: safely to store every available square inch of the oven and to use all speed in the process. Steadily and correctly he packed, therefore, and, wasting neither space nor time, exercised care and delicacy in touching the unbaked clay and precision in placing the biscuit.

Samuel Punchard was not a little impressed and puzzled when the work was done, and the oven ready to be sealed up and fired.

"Do you mean to tell me you've never done that job before?" he asked, viewing what was visible of Porter's handiwork.

"Yes, Mr. Punchard. But it don't ask for a very clever man to do it. You only want to know how."

"That's all right; but how the mischief *do* you know how?"

The boy laughed.

"I've watched Christopher Ede now and again when I had a minute, and Jack Ede gave me a hint or two. It don't go much beyond quick fingers and common sense."

Mr. Punchard examined the hole left for his future trials and the pieces of maimed china placed where his steel probe might impale them and draw them into the daylight.

"All right, I see."

"I only took ten minutes longer than Chris-

topher Ede takes. Next time I'll take the same, and next time I'll take less."

His confidence amused Samuel.

"You'll get too clever for your boots afore long, and then you'll get the sack," he prophesied.

CHAPTER XII

RUPERT THE BOLD

PORTER made a friend of the "handler" and painter, Rupert Marsland—why, he could not have told, for the young man was much older than himself and they had nothing in common. But since Rupert offered friendship, the boy was glad enough to accept it. He found that Mr. Marsland did not attract him in any particular of character, and presently perceived that the painter was not liked, by reason of his extraordinary vanity. He had merely encouraged Harvey that he might win an admirer, hear himself talk, and enjoy the pleasure of patronizing; but while the younger soon perceived that this was so, he gained something, too, and for the present preserved the attitude of admiration and respect that Mr. Marsland demanded. Porter won more than mere amusement from the elder's tricks and weaknesses of character, for Marsland repayed his compliments practically. They would go out together after hours, and the "handler," like many vain men, was generous under adulation.

Porter had made opportunity to see Mr. Marsland at his work, but while the business of "handling" interested him little, the more varied matter of decorating the ware with conventional patterns attracted him a good deal.

He came by appointment one day, that he might watch the operation, and Mr. Marsland had his tools and paints arranged with as much effect as possible to impress the boy. He painted with coloured "slips" arranged around him in saucers. They were of white clay, tinted variously, and they had the consistency of liquid cream.

Fifty mugs waited Mr. Marsland's craft, and he bade Harvey stand and watch while he wrought upon them with long-haired, soft brushes, dipped in the various colours and used very wet and heavy.

"'Ups and downs,' we call this," he said. "Just a row of little twiddles, now up, now down, round the edge of the cup. I put them in like lightning, as you see."

In a few seconds he had set one-and-twenty regular splashes round his mug. The piece was held in his left hand, and his right was steadied to the work by pressing his little finger against the pot. His pliant wrist and steady touch did the rest.

"Like most things done with great skill, it looks easy," said Rupert. "People watch me at work, and little know what goes to it; but let them touch a brush themselves, then they soon see."

He worked on, using now one colour and now another.

"Spots and streaks and twiddles and the peacock's feather design—all go on with the same ease and swiftness," he explained to Porter. "Seven colours go to each piece, and there are sixty touches of the brush upon each piece. Of course, like it is with all brain work, you don't do

as much one day as another. You have your good days and your bad days. Sometimes on my good days, when my fingers are almost bewitched, you might say, I astonish myself, and my hands work quicker than my brains, and I'll do five-and-twenty to thirty dozen such pieces as this in a day! That's eighteen thousand touches and streaks of colour in eight hours—each laid to a hair in its proper place, and every one carrying the proper weight of colour, not to mention the perfection of the freehand drawing of the peacock's feather. Think of all that on three thousand pieces of ware in an eight-hour day!"

"You wouldn't believe it could be done," declared Porter reverently.

"You wouldn't," agreed Mr. Marsland. "And it often surprises me, of an evening, when I go my way and meet other men, workers in shops and so on—it often surprises me to feel what a gulf is fixed between us in point of skill. It's just a gift—and of course developed. If you have a gift, it's nothing unless you develop it. I've often thought that those boasted men, who go into Parliament and write books and act on the stage, and do other suchlike things that make a noise, would cut but a poor figure if they had to do my work."

Porter was making a calculation to please the braggart.

"You may say that in a good week you'd paint eighteen thousand pieces and put on a hundred and eight thousand splashes of colour."

"No doubt that is so. It certainly rather staggers the mind. And all done with the art that conceals art—you mustn't forget that. I'll chal-

lenge George Easterbrook, or any man, to pick out a pot anywhere from a batch of pots, and find one not just as perfect as the rest from end to end."

"Don't you ever get tired?" asked Porter, and Mr. Marsland declared that he did.

"The spirit never gets tired," he said, "but the body flags. My wrist and fingers—iron though they are—do flag a bit at the end of the day; and that's one of the advantages of being a many-sided man, like I am. You might look a pretty long way and into a good many potteries before you'd find a 'handler' and a painter in one man; but so it is, and, of course, the result is that my usefulness is just doubled; and my money ought to be also, which it is not."

"When you're tired of painting, you go and roll handles, I suppose, and when you're tired of handles you come and paint?"

"Just so," admitted Mr. Marsland; "and in the words of the poet, 'I touch nothing that I don't adorn.' Don't think I apply those words to myself—far from it. But a young lady did so—my *fiancée*, in fact."

Harvey regarded him with increased respect.

"Are you engaged to be married, Mr. Marsland?" he asked.

"I am," answered the painter. He worked steadily while he spoke, and his skill, despite his vanity, one could not choose but admire. It displayed a most perfect dexterity and command of resource in the small matter of his business.

"Yes, I am engaged, and when you have got some new clothes, I may very likely introduce

you. It was what the story-books call a pure romance, and quite unexpected by me, I'm sure."

"I suppose I couldn't hear about it?" ventured Harvey.

Mr. Marsland considered.

"I like you," he said, "and I think if you work hard you will do well. In fact, as you know, I have made you a friend in a sort of way."

"It is a great thing for me, Mr. Marsland."

The other was silent, considering his betrothed. He believed that the affair redounded so much to his credit that he determined to tell the boy how it came about.

"You shall hear," he said. "These things won't be hid, and a good few round about know already for that matter, especially the women. A girl, if she's suddenly lifted up above her station, can't keep quiet about it. In fact, everybody that moves in our circle has got to know. It was like this: I go and come in the dinner-hour, because my widowed mother, who resides at the town of Kingskerswell, is supported by me, and likes me to be home for dinner. Well, I pass the steam laundry, where that big chimney is, and just at the time I pass it, the laundry girls are off work. And they stand in the road and take the air, and often chaff the passers-by. They are a very independent class, and though many people think them rough and ready, they often have hearts of gold. But not all, of course. Some of them are no better than they should be—like it is in every other class of females; but because a girl happens to be doing laundry work, it doesn't follow that she is

not a clever and superior creature, capable of rising to higher things."

The mugs flashed through Mr. Marsland's hands as he spoke. He had finished a board of them.

"Well, passing by one day, I was stopped by two or three girls with a skipping-rope. They'd sauced me once or twice before, and I had given them a taste of my repartee, which is pretty sharp, I may tell you; and then one day a dark girl, called Lucy Sellars, and a fair girl, with golden hair and a long neck and a fine figure, got messing about, and wouldn't let me pass. Of course I was a match for them, and there were a dozen other women sitting up on the hedge opposite the laundry to see the fun.

"They kept the skipping-rope going, and I couldn't pass. So I gave them a taste of my quality. 'Now, miss,' I said to the yellow-haired one—in a red pinafore she was, and her hair screwed up in curl-papers for the time being—'now, miss,' I said, 'let me go by, or I'll kiss you.' 'He wants to go home to his mother!' sings out a big, noisy woman in the hedge. 'I'd sooner go home to her than you,' I said, quick as lightning. And then, before red pinafore knew where she was, I'd kissed her on the mouth! She'd dared me, and so I done it; and I may tell you there's pretty well nothing in that way I wouldn't do, if dared. There was loud applause from the hedge, and coming by next day, I gave the girl a memento—in fact, a pair of little vawses. And in a week from that day we were walking out! She's called Miss Alice Appleby, and she's got a mind and is as straight

as a line. She's a good learner, and I'm educating her up to my height. Of course she's left the laundry now she's my *fiancée*. She lives with her parents, and her father's head-drayman at the Newton Brewery, and she's got work in a green-grocer's for the present. I take up a paper called 'Knowledge in a Nutshell' every week for her."

Harvey Porter listened to these facts with becoming respect, and then he spoke:

"I'm sure it's very kind of you to be friendly to me, and I think a lot of it. And if I can only please you and Mr. Easterbrook, I don't care."

"As to him," murmured Rupert, "you mustn't think to go very far with him. He keeps us down because, though a very clever and kind man, he's jealous of anything much out of the common. 'Tis a case of 'thus far shalt thou go and no farther' with him. I know him inside out, though you needn't tell anybody. If I was to let myself go and do a bit of dazzling work on my own, or invent a new decoration, or do any of the things I easily could do, would he encourage me? Far from it, Porter. He'd get uneasy, and say, 'If Marsland can work wonders like this at five-and-twenty, only the Lord knows what he'll be doing when he gets to his prime.' And so instead of rewarding me and doubling my screw, or anything of that, he'd very soon send me packing. He's just, but he's jealous, and if he began to think I was cleverer than him, I'd be invited to look for work somewhere else in a week."

Porter understood.

"So you lie low a bit?"

"I do," declared Rupert, "and there's nobody

but Miss Appleby knows what a tight hand I keep on myself. Take teapots. Not a year ago I got a great thought about handles—to give 'em a couple of twists and put art into 'em. It would have taken longer and asked for a pinch more skill in the 'handler,' but that was nothing to me. I showed him the great thought in clay, and he turned it down without a moment's reflection. 'We'll struggle along with the straight handles, my son,' he said. 'They're better, in my opinion, and people are mighty conservative in the matter of teapots.' Those were his very words. Up in arms in a minute, you see, for fear I might get too much fame in the works!"

"What did you do?" asked Harvey.

"I just shrugged my shoulders, haughty-like, and left him. 'Don't you stop trying,' he said, as I went out of the office. 'I'm always ready and willing to pay for a good thought and praise the thinker.' But, of course, he isn't, really. Many a fine thing flashes to me as I work. In fact, hardly a day goes by but what they come. But I let 'em go again. Besides, I didn't much like him calling me 'my son' in that free and easy way. I'm not his son, though I dare say he wishes I was, for a son he always wanted, I believe. But when anybody calls you 'my son' in that tone of voice, it shows he may be friendly, but it also shows he hasn't any great respect, and puts you on a lower level than himself. And I won't be put on a lower level than other people, Porter."

"You're terrible proud without a doubt," said the boy.

"So Miss Appleby tells me. No doubt we all have our natures."

He laughed suddenly.

"To show you the sharp wit of Miss Appleby, I may mention a thing she said not a month ago on that very subject.

"'Of course you're proud, Rupe,' she said. "'And how can you help it—painting thousands and thousands of peacock feathers like what you do?' Pretty good, eh?'"

"Awful good," declared Porter. "She must make you die of laughing, I should think."

"She does. But only me. 'Tis kept for me. In company you'd never think how she can come out. And that's what young ladies ought to be, in my view. She knows my opinions. If I caught her carrying on with anybody unknown to me, it would be 'good-bye' double quick."

"I hope I'll soon have some new clothes," declared the other. "I've been allowed to do a bit of overtime along with Mr. Tolley, and it will very near run to a suit in a month or so."

"Then you shall be introduced," promised Mr. Marsland. "She hasn't got my pride, but she knows what she owes to herself, of course. I've taught her that. I've named your name, as a boy rather out of the common who ran away from a workhouse to better himself. She thinks nothing of that."

"I'm getting on, I'm sure," declared Porter. "Mr. Easterbrook has bid me go for a walk with him next Sunday afternoon. A very generous and kindly thing for him to do."

"You surprise me," answered the painter.
"Does he know I've took you up?"

"I told him you'd been very kind to me."

"Ah! Then I reckon you may thank me for it. And mind you fall in with his opinions and so on, and if painting comes up, you might mention you'd figured out my work in thousands and thousands of touches and flourishes a week. Sometimes we get so used to a big fact that its bigness is forgot. And it's a good thing to remind ourselves that some of the most everyday things that happen are, at the same time, the most wonderful."

"I'll be sure to say how wonderful I thought it," promised Porter, and he kept his word.

CHAPTER XIII

A SUNDAY WALK

ON the day before the important event of his walk with the master, Harvey found a gift waiting for him with Mrs. Tolley when he returned from work.

"Here's a suit of clothes," she said; "a present from Mr. Easterbrook."

With pride the boy donned his new garments, and arrived before his master's house at the appointed time. Joanna was in the front-garden waiting for her father, and Porter stood for a moment in doubt whether he might enter until Mr. Easterbrook appeared. He decided to do so, however, approached the girl, and took off his hat, as he had seen men salute women.

She was friendly, and bade him welcome.

"Father'll be here in a minute, Mr. Porter," she said. "We're going up over the hill if it holds fine."

He had never been called "Mr. Porter" before, and doubted not that his new clothes had won the ceremonious affix.

He mentioned them without a shadow of self-consciousness.

"Mr. Easterbrook has been so good as to give me these beautiful clothes, miss," he said, "and

I'm very wishful to see him and thank him for them."

"D'you like the pattern?" asked Joanna. She had chosen it, and the subtle boy guessed as much by her interest.

"I do," he answered. "If I'd see a thousand patterns I'd have liked this best. They're much too good for me."

She regarded the clothes calmly.

"They're a bit tight in the shoulders seemingly," she said.

"So they are then; but Mrs. Tolley can right that. The wonder is they fit so well. I never had such clothes before, of course."

George Easterbrook appeared, and Harvey instantly thanked him with genuine gratitude.

"I'm properly grateful, master, and I'll show it come presently, and I'll never rest till I've made up to you for all your great goodness to me."

"Time enough," said the man, but his heart was warmer for the boy's thanks.

They started to walk through the naked lanes of winter, and as they did so Easterbrook spoke.

"One thing I've got to make clear to you, Harvey Porter," he began. "That's not your name, we know, but only my household knows it is not, and so we'd better leave it at that—unless you want to go back to your true name."

"I don't, sir," he answered. "I'm Harvey Porter for evermore if you please."

"It was my daughter who may be said to have found you out; and she knows how it is; and Miss Medway knows how it is; and Mr. Pitts knows how it is; and I know how it is—we four, and no

more. And we've considered of it, and we've agreed to believe you. If you'd gone to the reformatory for any great and deep wickedness, I should have sent you back there; but you did not according to your story. So I'm marking my good-will and trust by doing a bold thing. If any man had ever told me that I should break the law of the land, I should have laughed at him; but I've come to it. On your account I've done it; and I look to you to take very good care that my deed is not in vain."

"That's what I'm living for," said the boy quietly. "You're everything in the world to me, and there's nothing else in my life at present more than to show you the sort I am."

"Leave it at that, then," answered Mr. Easterbrook. "Promises are easily made, but you're going to keep them, I hope."

He was silent, and they trudged along, while the boy asked questions and Joanna answered them. He knew more about the country than he pretended, but inquired concerning the things around him that she might talk. He admired her mightily in her quiet reserve, and hoped that she did not feel unfriendly to him.

They ascended among winter fields to a high hill whose sides were partly clothed with naked woods. Porter's eyes caught sight of the familiar grey tower, reduced to a little smudge in the valley four miles distant.

"There's the works!" he said.

Joanna could see them, and helped her father to do so. He noted Harvey's enthusiasm, and told the boy about the tower and its original purposes.

"Tell Mr. Porter how you found it, father," said Joanna, and Easterbrook gave a glimpse of the past. There was a seat at the top of the hill, and they sat there together, while the master smoked and told the story. Harvey listened intently, and when he had done the man invited him to speak.

"What think you of that tale?" he asked, and felt some interest to learn the reply. But it was unexpected. He had yet to glimpse the nature before him.

"I'm thinking what a fine way you came to the tower, master—and what a poor way I came to it."

Easterbrook understood.

"Your life's to live," he said. "The past can very well bury the past. Don't let the future dig it up again—that's what you've got to look after. *Don't let the future dig it up again.* I was a man when I found Brunel's Tower; you came to it as a hunted boy. Better than you have made a bolt for freedom and lived to be thankful. Use freedom wisely now you've got it."

Porter was silent, and Joanna stole friendly glances at him.

"You've made a lot of boys proud to work for you, I reckon," said Harvey, at length. "But there was none so proud as me. That's nothing, of course, because they came to you with good characters. But to be took on trust is a very great thing."

"So it is, Mr. Porter," declared Joanna. "Father's like that. And father never makes a mistake about character, do you, father?"

"Mustn't boast, Joanna. We'll go back through the lanes and round Watcombe way."

They were about to move when a wagtail alighted close at hand, and ran with a little flirting motion along the grass.

"What bird is that?" asked Harvey.

"A dishwasher," declared Joanna.

"And a very interesting bird in itself," said Easterbrook. "A wagtail is the smallest bird that walks or runs. Every other bird so small as that hops. Now, why does a wagtail walk at his work instead of hop, Harvey Porter?"

"I don't know, sir."

"And not the wisest man on earth knows. It's hidden from human understanding."

"Perhaps there ain't any reason in particular," suggested the lad.

"That won't do. Be sure there's a reason. Nothing happens without a reason. And if we knew the reason, very like it would open the door to greater things."

"Why is a robin the bravest bird in the garden?" asked Joanna. "Other birds you can make brave with patience and time and presents. They'll get accustomed to presents, and when they've eaten your crumbs over and over again, begin to see you mean well to them, and trust in a sort of half-hearted way; but a robin gives you credit for friendship from the first. When I'm digging in Uncle Paul's garden, they'll often come and settle within a yard of my hand!"

"Only for what they can get, miss," suggested Porter.

"Not always. Sometimes they'll pop down and

pick up some little thing I can't see, or find a worm or what not; but sometimes they aren't hungry, and then they'll sit on a twig as near as ever they can get, and sing a little sort of undersong, quite sweet and perfect, but under their breath—a little winter song—just for me and nobody else."

"I expect they are terrible fond of you."

"It's a sad thing, but natural," declared Mr. Easterbrook, "that for the most part man is evil in the eye of almost every creature, except those that he's tamed for his own ends. He don't consider their rights and claims—as living beings—but only their value to him. And even domestic things, if they could look to the end of his kindness, would envy the free creatures that owe him nought!"

"Because he kills and eats them?" asked Porter.

"Yes—he breeds 'em and breaks 'em in for use, not love."

But Joanna would not allow this.

"You're too hard, father," she argued. "We keep scores and scores of things just for kindness and love, I'm sure—like dogs and cats and birds—and even foxes would be gone if it wasn't for our friendship."

Easterbrook laughed at that.

"You ask a hunted fox what our friendship's worth," he said.

"'Tis only the last hunt that hurts him," she declared. "Mr. Forbes, the huntsman at Kerswell kennels, told me all about that. They enjoy it—all except the last quarter of an hour on the day they are caught. But they've been hunted

many a time before, and got off; so they always think they'll get off."

"Forbes is a very clever man," admitted Mr. Easterbrook, "and we can all make a good case for what's nearest our hearts."

They chatted about natural things, and the master drew Porter out as far as he was able; but he had little to say, and preferred to listen. He was bright and keen, however, and quick to see a jest.

They fell in presently with acquaintance, and stopped to salute a very old, white-haired man and a girl of about the same age as Joanna.

They were Wilberforce Todd, of Todd's Pottery, and his granddaughter, Nelly.

Mr. Easterbrook shook hands heartily, and hoped the old man was wintering well; while Joanna kissed Nelly, for they were old friends and schoolfellows.

Mr. Todd came of a long race of potters, and his oral traditions, handed down from a father and grandfather, went back to the Old English potters of long ago.

He liked well enough to talk of these things, and though his friend had heard the veteran's stories often enough, he led to them now for the sake of the boy.

"This is a young chap by the name of Harvey Porter, who's come to Brunel's Tower," he said. "We hope to make a potter of him, Wilberforce Todd."

"'Tis all beer and skittles nowadays," replied the ancient. "It surprises me sometimes to think what an easy place the world is now for the young compared with what it was seventy years ago;

and my father used to say just the same to me, and tell me I didn't know my luck. My grandfather, you remember, George, worked along with those famous Dutchmen, the Elers. To Staffordshire they went, and nigh Bradwell Wood they set up their kilns. The neighbourhood was full of potters, and the red clay they wanted—not much unlike ours, I reckon—was to hand."

"I've got an Elers teapot in my little collection, Wilberforce. Have you ever thought what the coming of tea into England did for potting? There was a great fresh want, and it came as a godsend. When first tea came from China, of course the rage was for china pots and teacups to brew it and drink it; but they couldn't bring the porcelain over quick enough, and so England set to work to make ware delicate and choice enough for tea-drinking."

Mr. Todd allowed this.

"I read not long ago another instance of what you say. There's nothing like fresh wants to brisk up industrial needs. In the Dutch wars the noble people all sold their precious gold and silver plate for the King. And that's the reason why the French faience came on so fine—because the potters were called upon to make choice earthenware, fit for the gentlepeople's tables, to take the place of the plate. As to the Elers, they got as near making porcelain as anybody did—of course, before the time of china clay. 'Twas all tea-ware theirs: they never made anything else."

"Then, again, the black body was their invention, in my opinion," said Easterbrook, and Mr. Todd agreed with him.

"Not a doubt of it. They should have the credit. It was imitated by those that came after, and made perfect by Wedgewood, and called 'basalt.' And, more than that: I'll always stick to it myself that they introduced salt-glazing into Staffordshire. I must see your teapot again, George. 'Tis very well known to all of us who understand potting that genuine pieces of Elers are rare as swallows in winter nowadays."

"And teapots stood for more than tea-drinking," continued George Easterbrook. "They become a common gift, and common people who couldn't write often made a teapot stand instead. Lovers would exchange heart-shaped teapots; and there were teapots to commemorate a victory in war or at the hustings."

Mr. Todd laughed at a recollection.

"And fun would creep in, too. There was a lot of fun to potting. Did you ever hear of the 'Bacchus' teapot, George? 'Twas a favourite present for a toper."

They talked of Toft and his mighty platters; of Dwight; of Glass and a famous posset-pot, still extant, that Easterbrook had once seen in a private collection. Then Mr. Todd touched on the rascalities of Astbury and Twyford.

"Astbury was a damned rogue, and I'm the last to deny it," he declared; "but his name must stand along with the big potters for ever, rogue or no rogue, for 'twas he who found what flint could do for earthenware."

Then the veteran turned to Porter.

"Be straight, whatever else you may be," he said. "Astbury was a man with fine and delicate

feelings for pottery—a bit of a genius; but he had no sense of straightness as we understand it. He saw the Elers were doing better work than any round about Burslem, and so, with the proper potter's feeling for the best, he set out to win their secrets. They were foreigners—fair game—and that was enough for him. So he got into their works, and pretended he was weak in the head, and learned their secrets in that manner."

"If they weren't clever enough to see through him, I don't blame him. The game's to the strong," asserted Porter calmly, and the old man reproved him.

"You mustn't talk like that, my son. You must think in terms of right and wrong—eh, George?" said Mr. Todd mildly.

"That is so," answered Easterbrook. Then he turned to the boy. "You've got more to learn—a lot more—than potting, Harvey Porter," he said. "And I'm sorry you can speak or think so slackly. The man who don't blame Astbury for breaking the eighth commandment won't have my friendship for long. I only hope you don't know what you're saying."

Porter was troubled.

"Perhaps I didn't rightly understand, sir," he answered.

"I hope you didn't."

"At any rate, what he'd won by stealth he blazed abroad," continued Mr. Todd. "He made no mysteries and kept no secrets himself, and lifted the art of pottery by leaps and bounds. And when it came to the pounded flint, his discovery ran all through the Potteries like fire. It was the

first great step towards Josiah Wedgewood's earthenware."

"For all their fighting and miseries and uphill work, I'd sooner have been one of the old men than what I am—a manufacturer," declared Easterbrook presently. "It was the small strugglers, two and three hundred years ago, that did the fine things, Wilberforce Todd."

"And what a struggle they had!" answered the elder. "The tilewrights swarmed in Staffordshire in those days, for there was clay and coal everywhere, and to put up an oven and a hovel cost little but the labour. Then he'd set his wheel and his sun-pan, where the liquid clay was dried in the open air; and sometimes he'd just chuck the wet clay against a wall in dobs, because he knew, when it got dry enough to fall, it was about ready to work. Then, when there was enough, to market it would go, in panniers on the back of a donkey, with the potter's wife or daughter in charge. She'd take the stuff to the cratemen, or else just exchange it at the shops of the nearest town for food and clothes. A rough, hand-to-mouth time they had."

Wilberforce Todd continued to dilate upon the past until he reached his home, near the village of St. Mary Church. There he dwelt beside his pottery; and, to please his friend, he presently invited Porter to come and see him.

"We're only in a small way—not like Brunel's Tower, you know. But Mr. Easterbrook will tell you that we know a thing or two even he don't—eh, George?"

"Right, my old dear! So you do."

"And good for us we do," said the old master potter.

They parted with expressions of sincere friendship, and planned to meet again.

Then, when Nelly Todd and her grandfather were gone, and Mr. Easterbrook walked homeward, between Joanna and Harvey, he spoke.

"Mr. Todd's a very clever man, and one of the best that walks this earth. He came to the West-Country much as I did, but under different circumstances, and many years earlier. As a boy of your age he came with his father, who founded the pottery. They have a secret handed down from father to son. They can make pieces bigger than any made south of the Midlands—a three-foot pot's nothing to them. The work is moulded, not modelled, and the workmanship is good, though no more than that; but the pots are sought after for their size and their capital colour."

"Do you know their secrets, sir?" asked Porter.

"I do not. In the way of interest and business Mr. Pitts and I have studied the 'Todd' ware very close. But we don't know how it comes by its qualities. It's generally crazed a bit, for Mr. Todd has no ovens like ours; but it's unique in its way, and very interesting and valuable."

"Not a patch on Brunel's Tower, I lay," ventured Porter.

"More valuable, though not so beautiful," answered Easterbrook frankly. "It has its own interest, as secrets ever have. We're a manufactory. Mr. Todd doesn't put out much, and his works are small. But he's got his own special

market, and some of his things count above ours in the minds of some people."

"'Tisn't to be named with ours for beauty,'" said Joanna. "'Tis only queer, and size is nothing—I've often heard Uncle Paul say so."

At the end of their walk Easterbrook invited Porter to come and drink tea with the family, but he refused. He was conscious of having seriously erred on the subject of Astbury's morals, and he felt ill at ease. Mr. Easterbrook's sharp censure puzzled him. Now he made an excuse.

"I haven't been to church yet, and I promised Mrs. Tolley to go to chapel with her to-night," he said; "thank you kindly, I'm sure, all the same, for I'd much like to come."

"Keep your promise," said Easterbrook. "Never let nothing come between you and your word, Harvey Porter."

The boy made timidly to shake hands, but Easterbrook did not see, and Joanna was already half-way up the garden-path, under the impression that he was following.

"I'm terrible beholden to you, and it's been a very great thing for me to walk along with you and Miss Easterbrook, sir," he said.

The elder nodded.

"I'm glad you understand that," he answered.

His heart was warm to the boy; but still a shadow hung over one corner and chilled it.

BOOK II



CHAPTER I

THE STUDIO

HARVEY PORTER had marked the various physical and mental attributes of the workers at Brunel's Tower. Occasionally, strength and brains were needed in one man, as in the case of a thrower of big pots, where muscular power and high skill were both demanded; but in many departments strength only was called for; while in others, dexterity and clean, sharp workmanship proved necessary to success. For the most part, all the finishing was in the hands of craftsmen, whether their work belonged to the mould, wheel, or lathe; but in the painting-rooms art began to assert itself, though only Paul Pitts and George Easterbrook himself created in the real sense, and could claim the name of artist.

And here Paul stood the greater, for his knowledge was deep and wide. In another environment he had been a sculptor; but even under the condition that controlled his life the man had done much original work, and certain of his achievements were well worthy to compare with the more famous creations of an older generation of potters, in the palmy days of Derby and Chelsea.

A man of taste, he felt, as the past masters had felt, that pottery might be the modest handmaid

of sculpture; and, as time and opportunity offered, he modelled figures for the kiln. In youth his ambition exceeded reason, but with time and experience he learned what might be done with his medium, and ceased to attempt work in earthenware that demanded china clay for its execution. Certain successes he could cite. He had won medals and awards; while popular pieces of his making had paid the penalty of their distinction, and been copied again and again by lesser men. He distrusted colour for fine work, and was here at one with his partner. They agreed that the red earth was agreeable in tone after firing, and their own more important compositions seldom received more than a colourless glaze. Mr. Pitts liked the terra-cotta for more reasons than one. Its tone satisfied him, and he held that, as a true local product, it possessed its own distinction, and might reasonably be sent into the world, to speak for itself and the district from which it came.

Now, at the wish of Easterbrook, who desired the boy to grow better acquainted with Paul, Harvey was permitted to enter the studio and watch Mr. Pitts at work. The room was lofty, and had one large window which faced the sunrise. None shared this place with the artist, and his own creations stood round about. The walls were covered with shelves and brackets, and on the shelves were ranged plaster-of-Paris moulds. All these had been made by Paul Pitts himself, for his favourite and more popular designs were duplicated by the mould. Upon the brackets stood various pieces, and first Porter observed a figure of Grief

weeping over an urn. It stood three feet high, and was solidly modelled in mass, after such a fashion that to cast it from moulds was not difficult.

"A churchyard figure," explained Mr. Pitts. "When Samuel Punchard lost his brother, he was sadly cast down, and I made the figure for him, never thinking to make a second. But it brought such a deal of comfort to Samuel that Mr. Easterbrook reckoned we might copy it, and now, up at the extra-mural cemetery, a mile from here, very likely you would count twenty of them. The first, put up to Harold Punchard, still stands, and speaks pretty well for us. It's twenty years old, and not a flaw yet, they tell me."

Other lesser figures there were, and Porter suddenly laughed, for among the serious things were others, wherein Mr. Pitts had given rein to his own gentle and genial humour. There were many grotesques, moulded with the utmost freedom the clay allowed, and instinct with life and fun. They possessed a technique and power of handling beyond Porter's knowledge to appreciate; but the absurdity of them made a direct appeal, and Harvey rejoiced at a cat crouching flat and stalking a beetle. The lithe motion of the beast had been perfectly simulated, and its body was modelled with great understanding. A parrot pleased Harvey, too, and among serious things he ventured greatly to admire a girl's head, sweet and clean, graciously modelled, and with a pleasant suggestion of Donatello in the purity of line.

"That's my niece, Joanna Easterbrook," said Mr. Pitts. "She's not my niece really, but her

father and I have been friends from boyhood, and it's reasonable that there should be an understanding of this sort. She was twelve years old when I did that. It was exhibited at the Royal Academy of London and was well thought of."

"It's most beautiful, I think, sir," said Harvey. "I went walking with Mr. Easterbrook and Miss Easterbrook last Sunday afternoon, and she was so very good as to tell me a great many things about the country I did not know."

"She's a great lover of the country, and a very clever girl, and hath an eye for Nature which is rare in young things. Now you can ask what questions you please, and watch me at my work."

Paul's table stood under the window, and beside a little fire, for he was a thin man, and often felt the cold of his medium severely in the winter. Near him stood six of George Easterbrook's pots made on a recent Sunday morning, and now dried to the point of decoration. They were large and simple pieces—all variants on the classic models of the Greek.

"These are to be dragon-pots," explained Mr. Pitts. "Joanna laughs at me sometimes, and says my dragon is my familiar spirit. I designed it a good few years ago. But you cannot design the same thing twice, and so I made moulds of this favourite dragon, and reproduce him wing by wing and claw by claw. This is the mould for his tail. The art is to make the dragon part of the pot he belongs to, and order his turns and twists to chime with the lines of the pot. Sometimes he goes one way, and sometimes another; and other dragons I have which better suit other shapes."

He laid clay in the mould, then modelled the tail of the monster in a single strip, moistened the pot, and curled the tail round its surface. This he welded to the pot; then he affixed the wings and beak and head. The pot stood on a turn-table in front of the artist, and revolved freely. Presently, when the model was complete, Mr. Pitts took a little tool and worked upon the clay. He ran a fret along the backbone of the dragon, touched the lines of its face, traced the feathers of the wings, and from its feet sketched talons into the body of the pot, and drew a forked tongue protruding from its mouth.

Porter watched breathlessly.

"I never saw anything so interesting," he declared.

The kindly man illustrated the requirements of his work, and showed the difficulties.

"I hope you are one of the learners," he said. "There's two sorts of boys in my experience—those that want to learn and can't, owing to the unfortunate fact that brains were left out in the making of them; and those that don't want to learn, but could. But there are exceptions that prove the rule, and I hope you are one of those very rare boys that can learn and want to learn both."

"I am very wishful indeed to learn, sir."

"The works bristle with knowledge. But the thing is to store the knowledge and put it all in order. Everything bears on everything else you see, and a pottery is a very fine example of how men must trust each other. There's great responsibility here, and every man has his share of

it. If you want to be clever and useful, you must begin at the beginning—with the very history of the clay thousands of years before you were born. The history of the earth is the history of the hills and valleys round about. You can't understand china clay, for instance, unless you understand granite, and how Nature makes it; and how the quartz and mica and feldspar are all different, and all behave differently when time sets to work upon them. But here it's the good red earth we work in—a very cheerful, hopeful sort of stuff, in my opinion. It stretches all round about under the green hills. This region is called Tor Mohun, and you can see the mark of the old Saxons all round you in the place-names, like Tor, and Shiphay, and Barton, and Karswell. But the Normans came over with William the Conqueror, and these fat lands soon challenged them. The first Norman lord of Tor was called Brewere, and Tor Brewere it became. Then arose a Brewere of great fame, who was appointed guardian of a lord called Reginald de Mohun, in the third Henry's time. Presently this lord took Brewere's daughter, Alicia, for his wife, and the heiress brought the manor of Tor with her to her husband. So the place became Tor Mohun, according to the custom when the great tacked their names to their lands. And Tor Mohun it has been ever since. There's an old story that tells how pots were made in the vale as far back as Saxon times; and if that be true, you see Brunel's Tower is following a very old tradition. And I would not say it was not true, for the clay was here then as now, ready to the hand of the potter."

Mr. Pitts chattered thus amiably while he worked, and the listener, whose heart was ever ready for hero-worship, soon exalted him to a niche only less sacred than that which held the master. He regarded Paul with reverence, as a very great man, and already longed to be emulating his achievements.

He asked for advice and got it.

"Feel your feet: that's the first thing. 'Tis no use your wanting to do this, or do that, for the present. Begin by doing exactly what you are told to the best of your power. Mr. Easterbrook's a wonder in that respect. He never keeps a man at any work if he can do better work. You'll find a very rare gift in him—to find what a man can do before the man himself knows it. And what's the result? Content, for the man that's doing what he can do well is likely to be the happiest. My partner stands between no man and his ambition, and when your feet are firm and you understand the beginnings, and what a potter ought to know, then it depends on yourself where you'll reach. Any man or boy can put his spare time into improving himself. And remember this: the higher you want to go, the harder you'll have to work. That's only fair. Try to learn to be a draughtsman if you want to be somebody here. You may not have it in you, and, on the other hand, you may. Don't waste your spare hours."

He poured out his good counsel, and Porter listened with the utmost attention.

Then Easterbrook entered the studio.

CHAPTER II

THE SHARDS

GEORGE EASTERBROOK desired speech with his friend, and he had chosen this moment and place for leisure and privacy. At home it was not so easy to find opportunity for private conversation, and since the obstacles ahead partially concerned their home circle, the master came now to speak with Paul in his studio, where they would not be interrupted.

A circumstance had precipitated his trouble, and the accident of a meeting with Thomas Body, the fanatic thrower, decided Easterbrook to place his problem before Pitts. The men had no secrets from each other, and sometimes one would cut the knot of a difficulty, sometimes his partner.

Easterbrook, hastening through an open court, had come suddenly upon old Tom Body standing in solitude, where the shards, broken cloam, and shattered crocks lay heaped together in a corner. The ruined crockery served its purpose, for every fragment went to the blunger again, and was ground up once more and incorporated with the virgin clay; but at this stage in its interrupted passage the cracked and maimed ware presented a dismal show, and the spectacle of Body, himself tottering on the verge of mental ruin, standing gaunt and clay-stained here, surveying the wreck-

age, smote upon Easterbrook and touched his heart.

"Why, Tom," he said. "What's up? Lost anything?"

The moment after he had asked this question George perceived its double significance; but of course Mr. Body did not.

"I come here off and on to think," he answered. "'Tis a sight to make the gay man turn grave and the thoughtless man turn thoughtful. For why? Because this rubbish-heap be a true picture of the world's rubbish-heap, George Easterbrook, and you can follow the clue through and through it. As we be turned from clay to cloam ourselves, so's all this earth full surely; and these shards be like the folk—take 'em how you will. First there's them that ban't turned true—them the oven breaks; and ain't there thousands that ain't turned true on the wheel of life; and don't the world break them? Then there's them that started all right, but Fate was against 'em, and their promise was nipped in the bud through no fault of their own. Each piece of all these broken pieces have got its own story, like each man and woman of all the broken men and women you see round about on the earth. There's this difference, though. At Brunel's Tower we make more than we mar; but the pottery of the world mars more than it makes. To draw a blank be the common lot, George Easterbrook."

"Not among my pots as you say, Tom, or else I should mighty soon be drawing a blank myself, and Brunel's Tower would go back to the jack-

daws and starlings, and ruination take the works—eh? We don't have many mistakes."

Mr. Body shook his head and pointed to certain pieces that had been fired twice. Some were broken, some were uninjured, but the painting upon them had been so indifferently done that they could not go to market or fulfil commissions.

"To what sort of human folk would you liken them failures of Miss Medway?" he asked. "Not a word against her, God knows, for a woman that's done better work in her time, or stood to work closer, don't paint crockery. But now the eye is dim and the hand shakes, though the hunger for work be noways dulled. She toils on, so sure of herself as when she was forty; and the humour of it, to my thinking brain, lies in this: she don't know what she's doing—she don't dream what the poor scarred pots are saying and thinking here—creatures thrown true, turned true, yet marred to death by her old hands. Not cruel hands, mark you; not careless hands; not hands that would willingly hurt a hair of their heads; but just hands that have lost their cunning and ought to be still. And so the workwoman goes on her way rejoicing, and the pots come here—hid from her by the kindness of the human heart."

Easterbrook was interested.

"What of it, Tom?" he asked.

"That's not for me to say. You do to others as you'd have them do unto you; you'd wish that when your hands was twisted with gout, or your shoulders with palsy, and you could tame the clay no more—you'd wish then for gentle folk around you, and them you loved, to hide your gathering

weakness and guard you from knowing the night was upon you. And so would I. But the facts remain, and to me the opinion of these marred pots—marred through human weakness—doomed to failure you might say, through the softness of men to an old woman—that's the interesting thing—the view of the pots. I'd dearly like to know what they think about it."

" 'Tis examining too curiously, Thomas. 'Tis too fanciful a thing to put sense and feeling into the clay."

But the other shook his head and denied it.

"The clay have as much claim to life as us," he declared. "We be little gods in our own right and make the clay into creatures; and the clay have as much reason to consider the potter as we have a right to consider Him that made us. We feel the sting of God's failures in our diseased bones and suffering bodies; and why for shouldn't the clay feel the sting of man's failures in its cracked or ill-painted and flawed or crazed body? And as we go under the earth, to be built up again into new men and women, so the clay goes into the blunger to be built up again. But these pots—marred to death by her that cares for them so well, painted with love and blindness and ignorance—what be they but the spoiled children wrecked to perdition by too much worship in the home? For the love that bubbles straight from the well of a woman's heart, and ain't sweetened and strengthened through the filter of her brain—that's poison so oft as not; and them that be called to suffer it in their youth never lose the stain. It mars character, even as your aunt, all

unknowing, have marred these sorry creatures and brought them to this rubbish-heap through no fault of their own."

"I'm with you there—just as your pots stand firm on their feet, Thomas, from no virtue of their own. And just as you and I do the same, and stand on our feet from no virtue of our own. If the pots teach you that there's no such thing as free will, then they'll teach you what's worth knowing. 'Tis a sharp tonic that the world shrinks from. Man will do anything not to take the dose; but we've got to come to it, and when we have we'll face life with steadier eyes, and be more jealous and zealous for the unborn. We'll learn enough presently to prevent the maimed and the blind from marrying the next generation of men."

"Yes," answered Thomas, "and to prevent old women, as ought to be in the chimney-corner, from marrying the next generation of pots."

"You're a wise man, Thomas Body."

They parted then, and Easterbrook proceeded straight to Pitts. The things that he desired to say had long been in his mind, but this accident brought them uppermost roughly.

Porter was sent about his business, which for the present continued to be "oven-placing"; but his appearance in the studio of Mr. Pitts pleased the master, for it argued an invitation on the part of Paul.

Easterbrook thanked him now.

"I take it kindly in you to let that boy have a look round here. I didn't like to remind you about him, for I'm a bit tender over the lad, and don't want to force him down anybody's throat,

least of all yours; but it's granted I'm not often out in my measure of men and their natures. And I'm bound to say I find a lot of promise in him. Joanna's got my gift, so far as a young thing without experience can have it; and she thinks that he's more interesting than any boy she's run up against."

"I asked him, because I knew you wished it, George—for that and because I wished it myself. I'm as slow to read folk as you're swift; but you'll find me very ready most times to take man or boy at your value. He's a very clever sort of lad, and he's got what many clever lads have not—a modest way and a civil tongue in his head."

"He was interested?"

"Trust him! Everything interests him. He'll make his mark. He's feeling out. I judge there's even a pinch of that rare stuff, gratitude, in him. He's mighty wishful to pleasure you."

"Did he talk much?"

"Didn't get the chance. I talked and he listened."

"He can't listen to you too often, and I thank you for being at the trouble to talk to him, Paul."

"And welcome, George. He's a very interesting fashion of boy."

"So much for him. I didn't come to talk about him. Put your kettle on the fire and make your tea and eat your food. I've told Joanna and Aunt Sophia that I should be speaking to you in the dinner-hour, so they'll take their dinner in their own room. If I'd wanted a text for my discourse I'd have found it an hour ago. I met Thomas

standing amid the potshards. I believe he'd been speaking to 'em before I came up!"

Mr. Pitts nodded. He put a kettle on his fire, washed his hands at a sink in the corner of the studio, and took his meal from a basket.

"Poor Body!—he's going down the hill. He talks a good bit to the clay. Christopher Ede is turning the string-wheel for him now, and he tells me that Body chatters to the pots like his equals. He'll say he's sorry to 'em if he hurts 'em."

"And yet the sense mixed with his nonsense you wouldn't believe."

"I believe it very well, for I've heard it. He'll oft come here to me. I soothe him down and never laugh at him. For that matter I don't see anything to laugh at. He's got a fine mind and delicate feelings. I'd sooner have him flawed than many a man sound."

"That's what I say. 'Tis queer how quick as lightning he is to see another person's weakness. He pointed to Aunt Sophia's failures—on the rubbish-heap—the stuff, you know—that we can't even send to the people who'll buy it by the gross for bazaars. And a very fine lesson he drew out of it in his topsy-turvey way."

"Light still gleams through his mind, like the last sun through a thunder-cloud. But the light will grow weaker and the cloud blacker, I'm fearing. He does his work, however?"

"He does. There's no falling off there. I see how it is at the wheels. Adam Zachary wants his place, and watches him terrible keen and close. There's no more deadly critic of a man's job than

him that's waiting for it. But I don't blame Adam. It's natural. There's a weakening—the thin end of the wedge is in, yet there's nothing you can take hold of."

"He'd go mad if you send him away; but you'd never do that."

"Never. He shall stop here, if he's got to stop on a chain."

"I'll help to look after him. I've always liked him."

"Trust you to tame the wildest. We must wait and watch there. We'll hope, if it has got to come, that he'll drift into a harmless softness."

"If it happens that his own uselessness can be hidden from him, then he'll not suffer, perhaps," suggested Paul.

"I doubt. And that leads to Aunt Sophia. Body was cruel quick to see how she begins to stand in the way. He said out plain what many another knows, but wouldn't whisper before me or you. What d'you feel about it? The poor old dear—"

" 'Tis not a loss that you can cut, George."

"I feel in a way responsible to you."

Mr. Pitts laughed.

"Good Powers! Between you and me! 'Tisn't as if there was a company, and we were called to answer for other people's money, or interest. She's just as much to me as she is to you. I wouldn't hurt her for the world. Let her go on. After all, what is it? Not twenty pounds a year."

"It's the principle."

"Her content is worth more than twenty pounds a year."

"She's so terrible busy. How would it be if I were to hint to her that she ought to take life easier now and slack off from work?"

"If she won't heed Nature, she won't heed you. She knows that it must happen pretty soon. Her aches and pains speak to her by night with louder voices than yours or mine."

"Joanna's been at her a good bit; but she gets snappy."

"She's a mystery in some moods, like all women," said Mr. Pitts. "You know more about 'em than I do, and have had your experience, and sad enough at that. But with your aunt, I always feel there's a lot more out of sight than we can see. She's like the great icebergs: you'll sometimes run yourself hard against the unseen part and come off worst, much to your own surprise and trouble."

"She's touchy. I know what you mean. A harmless word will often hurt her. Then she hits back."

"Certain things she'll not hear. And if anybody was to whisper that her value was grown less, the fat would be in the fire. If her eyes were as bright as of old, she'd be the first to see the mess she makes on the earthenware nowadays; but they've dimmed as her powers have dimmed—sense, touch, sight, have all faded together, and she knows it not and feels it not."

There was silence; then Easterbrook spoke.

"There's something to be learned from it, Paul."

"Aye, there is. 'Tis a lesson for us, that think we still stand firm. When my hand falters and

my eye don't mark the change, may you be there to tell me. I'll take it from you. But I lay it would fall harsh from any other man."

George Easterbrook shook his head.

"I'm more likely to hear the fatal news first," he said. "And when my pots come along full of their troubles and grievances against the potter, don't you side with me against 'em!"

"If a man's art begins to whisper his age, the time has come to stop," admitted Mr. Pitts; "but 'tis a cheering thing to remember how many a great man has laughed at time and gone on making fine things after he was three score years and ten. If we had a museum of the art that counted, though it came from the hands of men in sight of eighty, there'd be still enough to fill it."

"You'd have to ransack the world, Paul. Then you say leave Aunt Sophia to go her way?"

"I do. She'll find out for herself all too soon. 'All too soon,' I say, because she's not a woman with resources to fall back upon; and when she stops work, her own works will stop."

"I feel that, too. She's like Samuel Punchard — Sunday bores her to death. She'd come and work o' Sunday with me, if she wasn't a Christian and held it wrong. But you look at her Sunday face and her Monday face!"

"Have a cup of tea, George?"

"Nay, I'm off to Torquay to eat a bit with a commercial from Gloucester. Then you'd let well alone?"

"I should do so."

There was a knock at the door, and Joanna entered.

"You must have done," she said; "and Aunt Sophia and I have half a lovely pie waiting to be eaten, and she's sent me to invite Uncle Paul to come and eat it."

Easterbrook went his way, and the artist followed Joanna to the workroom that she shared with her great-aunt.

CHAPTER III

ANN HATHAWAY'S COTTAGE

At Brunel's Tower the slip was made on the spot of white and red clay; but the stains came from elsewhere, both for slip and glaze. Easterbrook and Pitts specially prided themselves on their "royal blue," their "orange-gold," their crimson, and their green.

Into these mysteries Porter, of course, had not as yet penetrated; but there came a time when, at the invitation of Miss Medway, he was permitted to enter her workroom and watch her and Joanna.

His own work was still oven-placing, for when the wounded Christopher Ede returned cured he went to another occupation; but Porter had insinuated himself into most of the departments by this time, and while some were a little suspicious and resentful of the master's friendship towards him, they generally yielded when they came to meet him, listen to his questions, and hear his thanks for any information they might impart.

Among other things that he had considered was the nature of the favourite models—pieces repeated ten thousand times without wearing out their welcome in the market. There were many popular shapes and favourite designs. These did not embrace the important pots thrown by Easterbrook, and enriched with the dragons and other

decorations of Pitts, but they included certain vases, grotesques, and toys. There were also plaques, whereon West-Country views were printed or painted, and large pieces decorated with conventional treatment of the daffodil and the rose. A few little simple models also enjoyed steady sales, and of these one led Harvey Porter to take the initiative in a modest manner.

But now came his invitation to the workroom of Joanna and her great-aunt. At the appointed hour he polished himself up, then knocked at the door of Sophia Medway's studio, and was admitted. The old woman sat at one table, her niece at another. The girl rose, nodded, and shook hands; Miss Medway proceeded with her work.

"You can look at me first and at Miss Easterbrook after," said Sophia. "I'm at my daffodils, and she's painting roses."

"Thank you kindly, miss, if I may just stand here and watch."

"I can paint anything and everything, of course," began Miss Medway; "but there's two things I best love to be at, and one's the daffies, and one's the 'Dartmoor Cot.' I'll show you the daffies first."

"'Daffies,' miss?"

"'Tis the West-Country word for daffadown-dillies, or daffodils," explained Joanna, who had stopped her own work and come to look at her aunt.

"No doubt, in your ignorance, you only understand what you see, not what I see," said the old painter; "and to you the picture of the daffies burned in the biscuit looks but a faded, feeble

thing. And so it does; but somebody else will have a turn at it presently—a cleverer painter than me or Joanna—eh, Joanna? And that's Mr. Fire! He'll take this bit of clay, with my picture all faint on it, and find out the secrets of the stain, and melt the glaze over all, and make it first red hot and then white hot, so as you'd think no mortal mud would stand it; but all will be well with it, and while it's baking, he'll be busy with this mess of dim splashes and bring up the true colours, and fetch up one coat through another, and lift the grey to white, and the butter colour to gold, and the blue to grass green. Mr. Fire will do all that—eh, Joanna?"

"All that and more, Aunt Sophia."

"And then the glaze—that you've only seen as pink slush in a pail—",

"I've done a bit of dipping, miss," interrupted Porter. "I've dipped some of your beautiful painting, and Miss Easterbrook's red roses, too, and was almost frightened to see everything smothered up in the glaze."

"'Tis only hid for the minute, to burst out again, like we do after we're dead and buried," declared Miss Medway. "For the glaze turns to glass when it's melted in the oven, and you'll see the flowers come out through that invisible coat, when the pot cools, all so bright and fresh and flashing that you'll almost swear the morning dew hasn't dried off them!"

"I know, I know—that's just how they look when they come out the second time," he said.

"And now you'd best to watch. Push the green slip nearer, Joanna."

With her dishes about her, Miss Medway put on a second pair of spectacles over the first and began to paint, using the soft long brushes that Harvey had already observed in the hands of Rupert Marsland. She set in the perianth and the trumpet of her flowers, then struck on the foliage with single strokes. Her hand shook a little, but its old skill was not quite gone, and she took special trouble to do well. The paint fell liquid—thin here, thick there—and these accidents of quality brought life and sparkle to the piece at the second firing. But on the actual application the unbaked clay soon sucked them in. Each stroke grew dim and dull before the next was laid, and it seemed difficult to appreciate the fact that fire would effect such magic changes.

"It's terrible interesting to think what chemicals are hid in the paint," declared Porter; "a lot of learning must go to it—and no doubt there are wonderful things to be found out yet."

"You're looking at painting now," answered the old woman sharply. "If you want to be talking, say so."

He begged pardon and was silent, while she brought daffodils into being on pot after pot. Then he spoke again, praised her skill, and ignored the frequent falters of the brush.

"'Tis beyond belief, miss. I never should have thought it could be done."

"It shows you what practice will bring the hand to," she said. "'There's daffodils painted by me all over the world, and, please God, I shall paint a good few thousand more yet. Now you can watch my niece at the roses, and when I've fin-

ished this batch, I'll paint a few of the 'Dartmoor Cots' for you to see."

"Thank you, I'm sure. How long might you have been at this work, miss, if I may make so bold?"

"I was painting in the Potteries when I was seventeen," declared Miss Medway. "From seventeen to over seventy is a far cry, boy."

"For certain it must be, miss."

Joanna was nervous under his sharp eyes, and he saw it. The rose petals fell awkwardly. She laughed, and thrust away a failure.

He turned to others that she had painted before he came.

"How you can carry the whole bunch in your mind and paint it so true and beautiful again and again is a puzzler, miss," he said. "And to think this dull colour will spring out into the bright pink after firing! I wonder how many roses you've painted in your time?"

"None worth mentioning. I've only been at them a few years. If we could know the number of daffies Aunt Sophia has painted, that would be something," declared Joanna.

They chatted; Porter ventured on a jest or two, and she laughed. He had opportunity to study her at close quarters while she painted, and he admired her white neck, which showed above the collar as she bent over her work; and her fine mound of hair held up by a honey-coloured comb. It broke from beneath the comb into little curling wisps. The contour of her face and shoulders, too, he marked. No girl had quickened his blood as yet; but he perceived that she was a fine girl,

strong and brave, with a pleasant voice, and eyes that were not frightened to hold a boy's.

He asked her to let him try presently—for he thought it might please her to see his helplessness. She rose, therefore, and he took his place. Then, with a finished plaque before him, he set out to copy it. His extraordinary power of observation helped him now, for he had watched her work closely. He took infinite pains and proceeded laboriously to lay in the petals.

Now she stood behind him, and it was her turn to steal a glance or two unseen. His collar was clean—put on for this occasion—she noted that; and his hair was cut close to the back of his head. It was black and shining. His ears pleased her, and she felt surprise at them, for such beautiful things, so trim and well set, she had never seen on a boy. There was a thought of pointedness about them as she had seen in the plaster cast of a faun in the possession of Mr. Pitts—just the shadow of a prick at the crown of the ear. His hand pleased her, too. It was well made and delicate.

He finished the petals; then took another brush and painted the leaves. She praised his performance highly.

"If you can do that as a first attempt, you'll soon be cleverer than any of us," she said. "Look what Mr. Porter's done, Aunt Sophia."

"And how long did he take doing it?" she asked.

"'Tis like other things: speed comes only with long practice, of course," declared Harvey. "And now I'm sure I've took up enough of your time,

ladies. But if I might just see the 'cot,' if Miss Medway would be so good."

The famous "Devon Cot" was a little model, two inches high and two inches long. It represented a tiny abode, with thatched roof and whitewashed walls, about which climbed honeysuckle and roses. The trifle proved a very popular keepsake among the thousands of visitors who annually came from the north for holiday-making in summer-time.

Miss Medway enjoyed painting the "Devon Cot." It was a labour of love to set in the little blue windows, spread "orange-gold" over the thatch, paint the chimney red, and with delicate brushes trail the creepers over the whitewashed face of it. Mr. Pitts was responsible for the original model, and many thousands had been sold; but of late the work proved too fine for the worker, and many of Miss Medway's cottages, unknown to her, went to the rubbish-heap.

She changed her slips and her brushes now, and he watched her paint the cots. Then, when the exhibition was at an end, Harvey, after many protestations of thanks and the expression of great gratitude, came to a little matter of his own.

He fumbled in his pocket, drew out some small object wrapped in a piece of newspaper, and asked if he might show Joanna something.

"And Miss Medway, too, if she'll be so very kind as to look at it," he said. "Mr. Body gave me a pinch of clay, and I've done the best I could."

He showed them the model of a cottage—the

most famous in the world—but they did not know that.

"What a dear little house!" cried Joanna. "You've done it most cleverly. Mr. Porter. I'd like Uncle Paul to see it."

"Is it took from a house in these parts?" inquired Sophia Medway.

"No, miss. The history of it is this: Turning over some pictures that belong to Mrs. Tolley, where I have my room to, I found a big print of this cottage. It is Ann Hathaway's cottage, and Ann Hathaway was married to Shakespeare, the great poet. And so I thought if the Devon cottage was such a paying thing, that very like a model of this famous house would fetch in a bit of money. And I set to work. Of course, this isn't near so fine as it would be if Mr. Pitts took it in hand; but I thought I'd dare to bring it to you ladies in hope one of you would be so very kind as to paint it for me. Then, if you thought well of the notion, I'd fire it on the quiet, which I can do, being oven-placer, and then, if it turned out pretty tidy, I'd be so bold as to show it to the master. But if you think I'm making too free, you'll say so."

Joanna applauded and declared that she herself would paint the cottage, and devote extra care to the operation.

"And I won't whisper a word of it to father or Uncle Paul," she said. "It shall come as a surprise to them."

"If you please," he begged. "I'd be much cast down if the thing was named first and then came out a failure. But if nothing's said, then no

harm's done. Only if you'll paint it, then I'm sure it won't fail."

Miss Medway, who doubted all innovations, reserved her judgment; but she was gracious, and went so far as to hope the idea might commend itself to her nephew; while Joanna, who had never plotted until now, rejoiced in the innocent enterprise, entered upon it with enthusiasm, and felt a great secret admiration for the ingenious Harvey. He promised to bring her the picture of Ann Hathaway's home on the following day.

"I can easily fetch it without Mrs. Tolley knowing," he said, "and when you've done it I can put it back. It's only a printed picture, but it may help you, miss."

Then Joanna locked up the model and Porter withdrew.

They talked of him when he was gone, and Miss Medway warned the girl against too much friendship.

"He's only a boy sprung from God knows whither," she said. "And though a very personable and civil-spoken one, still—he may be rubbish under his airs and graces. Don't you get to care for him, Joanna. And I've said the same to your father, for that matter."

Her niece protested at the idea.

"He's interesting, that's all," she said. "Father puts the surroundings of anybody before the blood in their veins, and so, as Mr. Porter has the good luck to be here, he can't fail to turn out right with all his sense. And this shows that he's clever, as father said he was. I believe, when you remember the people who come down from the

Midlands in summer-time, that this model may be a splendid line."

The business side of the question—indeed, the business side of all questions—interested George Easterbrook's daughter not a little. For she was practical, had been brought up to understand the value of money, and had shrewd ideas upon the subject. Already her father respected her opinions. But she was too young to mistrust the world as yet. She looked out upon it frankly with a centripetal mind, that was open and honest and prone to give her fellow-creatures the credit for her own transparent probity and plain dealing. First of all in the world, she pinned her faith to her father; and secondly to Mr. Pitts. And they were content that she should trust life without fear and say a welcome "yea" thereto.

Now she painted the work of Harvey's hands, and spared no trouble to perfect it. Then he took it back and gave it a first firing. Anon the biscuit was glazed and sent to the oven again. It emerged bright and lustrous from the second firing, and Porter revealed it to Joanna and begged her, if she thought it successful, to show it to Mr. Easterbrook. This, however, she would not do.

"'Tis your work first and last," she said, "and it has come out splendidly. You'll show it to father yourself and nobody else."

He obeyed her and, asking for an interview, was permitted to go into the office during the dinner-hour, where the master sat with his books.

Porter explained everything, told the story of the model, dwelt on Joanna's help and declared it was her work only that had made the little

house presentable; then he brought it out of his pocket and put it on the desk before George Easterbrook. The master was peeling an apple at the time, for he generally finished his light mid-day meal with fruit. Now he put down the apple and the little silver knife he used to peel it. Then he stretched his hand for his glasses and examined Ann Hathaway's cottage carefully.

"Who's seen this?" he inquired.

"Only Miss Easterbrook and Miss Medway, sir. I popped it in and out of the oven myself."

Other questions were asked and answered. Then Easterbrook bade the boy be off.

"I'll talk about it with Mr. Pitts," he said; "there's clay wasted here. It can be made half as light again. But I'm pleased. I won't say but what you haven't hit on a line; and the man or boy that hits on a line has nothing to complain of against me. Come in this time to-morrow."

That night Mr. Easterbrook wearied every ear in his home-circle save that of Joanna. She responded very heartily to her father's mood of gratification and, indeed, Mr. Pitts also was quietly satisfied. He saw that with a trifling technical modification or two, the model might be successful. Only Miss Medway chose to doubt. She was jealous for the "Devon Cottage" and upheld its claims. This interloper from the north, with its glamour and extrinsic fame, might threaten the "Devon Cot" and even shadow its popularity—so she suspected. But her nephew laughed at her fears. There was room and more than room for both, he declared; and if the new model eclipsed

the old, he would not be the man to grumble, since evolution must have its perfect way.

He proved correct. The new cottage was successful, and became a popular feature with summer customers; while the old cottage did not suffer from the rivalry. Porter's fame grew in the works. It was rumoured that Mr. Easterbrook had dealt generously with him and given him a royalty on his invention.

To Joanna fell the task of painting Ann Hathaway's cottage, and she admitted pleasure in it, but felt more than she confessed.

CHAPTER IV

WATCOMBE

FATE having thus smiled on Harvey Porter, his fellow-creatures were very ready to do the like. The man, Adam Zachary, who enjoyed the personal friendship of the Easterbrooks, father and daughter, considered Harvey and would often talk with him in the luncheon hour, while there came, too, a concession from Rupert Marsland, for he invited Porter to walk with him and his betrothed on a Sunday in May.

Girls had not interested Porter as yet, nor did they now. He would as willingly have gone for a walk with Marsland alone; but he perceived that the painter regarded this introduction as something of an honour, and though Harvey's perspective as to what was desirable and important began rapidly to change, he had not as yet reached a stage when he could regard with indifference the least offers of friendship.

Clad in the suit that Mr. Easterbrook had given him and Joanna had chosen, Harvey met Mr. Marsland and Miss Appleby at the head of Watcombe Chine, where the red mouth of the land opens upon the sea. He had not been here until now, and the impressive place awoke his interest.

They walked beneath a gaunt cliff, whose lower planes were raw and indicated a comparatively

recent fall of rock. Indeed, huge fallen masses still littered the way and barred the grassy path that wound below. But rearing above the wounded precipice, weathered heights of conglomerate and sandstone towered three hundred feet upward in a mass of beetling crags all honeycombed and scarred and riven by storm and flood. Time had mantled them with a thousand green things that now answered to the call of another spring. Beneath, upon a moraine, grew silver-grey rosettes of the hag taper, and ivy and clematis put forth young fingers and tendrils upon the rocks. Here, too, sprang the prickly legions of the thistle and brakes of the greater furze; while above, upon the shattered rock faces, crowning every ledge and peeping from every cranny where a seed might stay, dwelt flowers. Red valerian prospered aloft, and purple sea-mallows stained the high places; in a chimney between two great heights an alder had grown, and now broke the deep shadow there with starry umbels of white blossom. Perched higher yet wild carrot grew, and samphire; anthyllis and stone-crop painted the cliffs golden; sparkling silene and sea-beet crested the rocks, with dim pellitory of the wall and great dog roses—white and pink—that sprayed their delicate loveliness from dizzy ledges where only the jackdaws might find a perch beside them. The birds were nesting, and made Watcombe musical with their chime and chatter.

The trio passed downward, among many bright thickets and flowery knolls. A sheaf of wild cherry-trees sprang by their path, and the little vale was full of young brake-fern spreading to the

sun, and of whitethorn and blackthorn. The traveller's joy hung its ropes everywhere and knit all together. Miss Appleby told Harvey how fair the climber's silvery seed-clusters would be, fleecing the cliffs and trees with snow when the leaves turned red and yellow in autumn. She showed him the briony twining upward and spreading its heart-shaped foliage in the shady places, and the wild iris, whose scarlet corals would light each dene and dingle when November came.

"Then you get ripe sloes, too," she said, "and you can make sloe gin, can't you, Rupert?"

Down and down they went, until the cliffs opened starkly upon the sea and their crests and rugged bosoms framed the blue. Here Mr. Marsland declared that he would stop and rest; but his betrothed and his friend were not tired, and Rupert permitted Porter to escort the lady down another hundred feet of steep and stony acclivity to the water.

They descended and scrambled among the rocks; then Miss Appleby sat on a boulder above the waves, that churned the red cliff-bosses at sea-level, and Harvey flung stones and woke the echoes with shouting. They stopped on the little beach for ten minutes and picked up a few fragments of seaweed and a blue crab-shell; then they climbed aloft again, and Miss Appleby required support and assistance. Porter respectfully tendered these and presently restored her to the presence of the painter.

Rupert was indifferent, as an "intellectual," to the accidental beauties and graces of the combe, while Miss Appleby—a showy maiden clad in

brick-red, with a feather boa round her neck, a green parasol and a hat with half a crushed sea-gull balanced thereon—gave Porter glimpses of her erudition and adopted a tone now patronizing, now playful. But her lover allowed her few opportunities to assert herself. They sat down beside him now, and he improved the passing hour, became retrospective and drew illustrations of right conduct from his own achievements in the past.

The conversation became depressing, and even Miss Appleby felt that a lighter note might be struck with advantage. She endeavoured to strike it, but was unfortunate.

"I mind before I knew you, Rupert, how I came here first. I was a slip of a girl then and didn't know nothing; but there was a boy after me even then. Did I ever tell you about Billy Parsons?"

Mr. Marsland frowned.

"No," he said; "and this ain't the time or the place."

"It is the place," she answered, "because on this identical bit of grass—and me only fifteen—Billy, the ridiculous fool, asked me to keep company and be tokened! I wasn't the first either by a lot. A fiery red-headed toad; and if he didn't hunt the bushes and find a blackbird's nest and a hedge-sparrow's nest, and strubb them, and blow the eggs and make me a necklace! Strung the eggs on a thread from my petticoat, and nothing would do but I wore 'em!"

Mr. Marsland was hurt by this reminiscence.

"I've often told you to let the dead past bury its

dead, Alice," he said, "and if you must dig it up, I'll thank you not to do it before people."

" 'Twas coming here brought it back," she said. "I can see the freckled chap now. He squeezed me once and kissed my ear; and I slapped his face and he slipped down this bank and muddied the seat of his best trousers. Sunday, too, it was. Then we went down in the bushes and found a pool, and I cleaned him up a bit. Laugh! You could have heard the noisy creature at Teignmouth!"

Mr. Marsland preserved an ominous calm. But he smoked fiercely and his cheeks were beginning to grow red.

"What became of Billy Parsons, miss, if I may ask?" inquired Porter.

"Ah, that was the sad part. Such a dashing young chap, and no vice in him—only a sort of weakness for the girls. He went for a soldier two years ago. He was shot in a fuss in India."

"A good thing for him he was," said Mr. Marsland.

"Lor', Rupert! You ain't vexed? 'Twas only one of them ridiculous things that any girl could tell."

"Don't you believe it," he answered. "All girls ain't so easy as you by long chalks, and I'm getting about fed up with it! You've known me now two year, and yet you can tell a vulgar tale like that before a stranger. And it shows that——"

He stopped, conscious of Porter's round eyes. But Miss Appleby, who would not willingly have

annoyed her Rupert for the world, made a frank and full apology.

"I'm past praying for, and that's the truth," she said. "Heaven knows I wouldn't have told the story about that poor, dead, silly creature if I'd thought it could anger you. I hope you'll let it go in at one ear and out at the other, Mr. Porter, and think nothing of it. Though I dare say, if the little birds could talk, you and Rupert here have been up to your games in your time."

"I never was up to no games, miss," said Porter. "I never had the chance."

"Be damned if I know where you get these bar-maid sort of ideas from, Alice," burst out Rupert. "And Sunday and all. It gives you away; and it gives me away likewise, because people would think that you'd got 'em from the stronger vessel. But you never hear me talk light, and you never talk light yourself when you're with me alone. And yet, if there's anybody else present, you'll often make a remark that sends the blood into my face. And you'll do it once too often. I ain't made of patience, and it's very disappointing for a man so nice in his ideas as me to hear the woman I'm going to marry say things like you do."

"I've apologised," she answered, "and I can't do no more. You must remember that a girl isn't going to reach up to you all in a minute. I'm doing the best I can, and Mr. Porter knows so well as I do that it takes the stuffing out of anybody to keep at your level for more than an hour at a time."

"We can't all be so clever and deep as you, Mr. Marsland, that's quite true, I'm sure," said Har-

vey, whose sympathy was with Alice. "I know what Miss Appleby means. It's easy for you, with your mind; and you never have any need for a bit of fun, I dare say, being above it; but people like me—we must have a joke now and again, else we get low-spirited."

Miss Appleby beamed upon Porter.

"God's truth," she said. "And all in a nutshell! If only you'd slack off now and again, Rupe, it wouldn't do you no harm, and it would do me a power of good. A little silliness be like a bottle of ginger-beer with a dash of bitter ale in it. And who's hurt? 'Tisn't as if I ever said anything rude or vulgar. You know I never would demean myself like that."

"If you keep the conversation on the subject of me, I'll hear you," answered her lover. "I'm not above taking advice, because well I know that it's a good thing to see everybody's point of view, though generally that only makes me better satisfied with my own. But as to unbending the bow, I'll do that with the best. Didn't we go to Newton Fair last Easter Monday, and didn't I take you in the side-shows and give you the treat of your life?"

"We had a very proper day, though you wouldn't let me see the calf with six legs, nor yet the hairy woman," answered Miss Appleby.

"A calf with six legs is a matter of taste," declared Rupert, "and I put it to Porter here, if you, or any female, would have been a better girl, or a wiser, or more fitted to be my wife, if you'd seen a calf with six legs."

"I never like to lose a chance of anything," she

answered. "All knowledge is useful—I've heard you say that a million times."

"There's no knowledge in a freak of nature like that, and it showed a silly mind to *want* to see it," declared Mr. Marsland. "'Tis only a common order of people pay to see such things. I'd sooner pay not to, myself; and I want you to feel like that."

"I'm sure you've raised up my ideas a lot," said Harvey, "but a young woman, like Miss Appleby, has a light heart, I expect, and loves a bit of fun. Now I've got prosperous, and haven't to fret about things, or feel my hand is against everybody, I turn to fun. I never had no fun till now, but I'm very hopeful I may be allowed to have some."

"I didn't say nothing against proper fun," replied Rupert. "I'm as good for a joke and as quick to make 'em as anybody—ain't I, Alice?"

"Yes," she admitted. "On your day, and when you're in the mood for it, you can make a person split themselves. But it ain't often."

She turned to Porter.

"Once, down to Teignmouth on a Saturday afternoon, Rupe took a boat, and it was cruel rough, and he——"

"Stop!" said Mr. Marsland. "We won't have that tale, Alice, if you please. There's fun and there's fun; there's fun for a *fiancée*, and there's fun for the public and friends. That was just a bit of wit for ourselves—harmless enough, Harvey Porter—but not for your ear, or anybody else's."

"All the same, 'tis the funniest thing you ever

did, and I never liked you better than that day," she said.

"There's always a danger of being misunderstood in mixed company," declared the painter. "And one of the beauties of being engaged is that you mould the female's mind to such a pattern that never under any circumstances does she misunderstand you. Ain't that so, Alice?"

"Yes," she answered. "You're always right, and though your mind goes a long way farther than what mine can, I never misunderstand. I haven't got the brains even to do that. Your great ideas go off me, like water off a duck's back. And you might let me tell Mr. Porter what you did in the boat, if he swears to God he'll never let it out at the works."

But Rupert refused.

"I can't allow it," he said. "A thing like that doesn't amount to so much as you think, taken away from its surroundings and told in words on a Sunday afternoon. You want to know all the circumstances of the case, and what led up to it, and a lot of the things I said before, and so on. Let it go. Here's company, I see—Miss Easterbrook and Miss Todd—Mr. Wilberforce Todd's daughter."

As he spoke Joanna and her friend approached. The former knew Miss Appleby by sight, and now Rupert ventured to introduce her. Some stiffness and awkwardness marked the meeting, for Miss Appleby was nervous—an attitude that served to render Joanna ill at ease, and more reserved than usual. A common desire to part as quickly as possible showed itself, and Porter, after

a moment's reflection, decided that he would run some risk and join Joanna and Nelly. He guessed that he might not please Mr. Marsland, and possibly annoy Miss Easterbrook; but the prospect of a change of companions possessed no small attraction at that moment, for he was very tired of Rupert, and since the invention of "Ann Hathaway's cottage," his friendship had been much advanced with his master's daughter.

"Would you ladies let me walk along with you for a bit?" he asked. "Mr. Marsland and Miss Appleby don't want me much, because they are engaged to be married."

Nelly Todd looked at Joanna. She was a fair girl, and colourless. She felt great interest in men, but none had been attracted by her; for her face was plain, and none guessed at the spirit within. Many such are passed over, because man is too dull to see the flash of the secret fire.

"Two's company, and three's none," said Joanna.

"If that's so, miss," answered Harvey, "then I'd best to take my walk alone, for you've got Miss Todd, and Miss Appleby has got Mr. Marsland."

"We don't want you if you don't want us, I'm sure," said Rupert. "Come on, Alice."

He waved his bowler hat to Joanna, scowled at Porter, and departed. Then, when he was out of earshot, Joanna laughed at him.

"He's the most ridiculous person in our pottery," she said. "There's only one vainer man in it, and that's Adam Zachary; but Mr. Zachary's got something to be proud about: father thinks

very highly of his work indeed, and he's a reader and a clever, thoughtful man, so you can forgive him for being conceited, I suppose. But Mr. Marsland is only an everyday sort of man."

"I don't think he is," argued Harvey. "The mere fact that he's so fearfully puffed up makes him not everyday. And he does know a lot, miss—at least, perhaps to you he might not seem very clever, but to me he does."

"You'll soon get to the end of what he knows, Mr. Porter," declared Joanna.

Then they went forward together.

"I'm hunting for a flower—a rare flower that's to be found down here," said George Easterbrook's daughter, as they proceeded by a winding path above the rocks. "A bee orchis it is called—a little velvety black and pink flower—two or three on a stem—for all the world like bees. Uncle Paul wants it."

Porter, anxious to please, kept a sharp lookout; but the girls were more interested in him than in botany. Joanna's attraction was frank, Nelly's furtive. The plain girl concealed her attention; the handsome one was more ingenuous, and her friend perceived that she liked Harvey. His inexperience was extreme for a boy of eighteen. He accepted the fact that the girls had no objection to his presence, and was grateful to them, and desirous to make them feel the brighter for his company. Therefore he asked questions, and made them instructive and so happy.

"I lived by the sea myself once, when I was a little kid," he told them. "My father was a boat-

man at Sidmouth, and he was drowned in a squall years and years ago."

He was surprised that an incident that had ceased to have any sentimental interest for him made them sympathetic.

"I am sorry," said Joanna.

"What a sad, terrible thing!" murmured Nelly.

"No, it wasn't—not so much as you might think. My mother liked another man a lot better than father. It was a great weight off her mind that he got drowned. She told me so herself, for I was old enough to understand. And a fisherman that hated mother for some reason gave out that my father had tied the sheet and let himself be drowned on purpose. But I never would believe that, because, surely to God, life never can be so crooked that you want to finish with it."

"It can be like that," declared Nelly. "There's many men—and women, too—that have gone out of it because they'd had their dose, and was full up with it, and didn't want another day."

"But not just because your wife likes another man better than you," argued the boy. "If I had a wife——" He broke off, and laughed at the idea. "If I had a wife, and I got to find she liked another chap better than she liked me, I shouldn't get into much of a paddy about it. I should say: 'Well, clear out, and go to the man; and I'll look round and find another.' "

From their wider knowledge in the realms of feeling the girls protested.

"You've never fallen in love, Mr. Porter; has he, Joanna?"

"No—else he couldn't talk in that cold-blooded sort of way," answered she.

Then she turned to Porter.

"You'll be certain sure to fall in love some day. You may not want to do it, but you will. And then, if you think of the girl throwing you over and going to somebody else, perhaps you'll understand better how your poor father felt."

Harvey Porter was mild and humble.

"No doubt you know best, miss. Anyway, my mother went along with the other man, and left me with an aunt. This is my mother's wedding-ring on my finger. She died up in London, along of a street accident. The other man got tired of her before she died, unfortunately."

They looked at the ring with interest.

None spoke for a little while; then the boy made an announcement.

"This is my birthday—eighteen years old, I am. How old might you young ladies be, I wonder?"

"I wish you many happy returns of the day, I'm sure," said Joanna, smiling at him; "and we are as near of an age as can be. I'm eighteen next week."

"Fancy that! Which day, please?"

"Thursday."

"I'm older than either of you," said Nelly.

"Not worth naming, though," answered her friend. "You're only twenty, Nelly—only twenty back in April."

"You look younger than either of us," said Porter.

"So she does—being so fair and thin," declared Joanna. She meant not to hurt the other,

but did hurt her, for Nelly's slight proportions and lack of feminine splendours were a secret grief to Miss Todd.

Joanna fell into silence, and speculated as to the propriety of giving Harvey a present. Much to her surprise, it appeared that he saw no reason why she should hold back. He was happy and easy, and spoke with more freedom and sense of equality than he had done until this hour.

"If you'll give me a birthday gift, miss, I'll give you one," he said suddenly.

"And I'll give you one, too," declared Nelly.

"Then I'm in proper luck; and if you'd only let me name the gifts, then this would be the best birthday in my life, I'm sure."

"Whoever heard of such a thing as that?" cried Joanna. "All the pleasure would be gone if you knew what we were going to give you."

He stared.

"Why? You might give me what would be no use. But if I tell you, then you'd give me what would be a lot of use. But it would cost eighteen-pence—I warn you of that."

The conversation delighted Joanna.

"Say it out, then," she said.

"And will you tell me what I shall get you next week if I do?"

"I'll think about it."

"I've got your present already, Joanna," said Nelly.

"I want a razor," declared Harvey; and both girls exclaimed.

"You never, never ought to give anything that cuts for a present—'tis unlucky," declared Nelly.

But the boy scoffed.

"Don't you believe that stuff. Miss Easterbrook can buy me the razor, and it won't cut friendship, because I'd die for her father, so of course I couldn't fall out with her; and perhaps you'll be so good as to buy me a shaving-brush, miss? Then I'd be set up for life."

They promised gleefully; whereupon he came back to Joanna's gift; but she would name nothing.

"I like my birthday gifts to surprise me," she said.

He became cautious suddenly.

"You don't think the master would call it too pushing, miss?"

"No—why should he? There's a lot at the pottery give me presents on my birthday and at Christmas."

"Then I'll astonish you next Thursday; and if Miss Todd will be so kind as to tell me her day, I'll astonish her, too, when it comes."

Joanna was sorry that he had dragged in Miss Todd; but since Nelly had promised the shaving-brush, she felt Mr. Porter could do no less.

She found a bee orchis presently, and plucked it for Mr. Pitts. Then the girls explained that they were going to tea with a friend at St. Mary Church, so he left them.

CHAPTER V

A MASTER POTTER

HARVEY was duly set to the string-wheel, after watching a younger boy at it, and learning the little he had to learn. Mr. Body explained his duties, and he saw the boy, Charlie, perform them. The potter never spoke to this young assistant, but by certain movements of his head indicated when he should go fast, when he should go slow, and when he should stop. Indeed, even these movements were not necessary, for an observant lad had only to watch the creation of the pot to keep the wheel spinning at the proper speed. Porter won this simple knowledge as the result of an hour's observation. While Mr. Body made the ball and drew up his clay, the wheel sped swiftly; but when the delicate finishing was in hand and the clay ran thin, then the wheel revolved more and more slowly until all was done. The Sunday on which he was to serve Mr. Easterbrook arrived, and Porter reached the works an hour before him. The ordeal made him anxious, but not nervous, for he knew that he could not fail.

He went aloft, marked the master's clay waiting for him under wet cloths, and revolved the wheel once or twice to see that all was ready. Then an idea occurred to him, and he set about cleaning the trough and making the wheel brighter

and smarter far than Mr. Easterbrook was accustomed to find it. For Thomas Body attached no importance to such trifles, and liked the red clay spattered about his work as well as his person. Having made all as clean as he was able, Porter descended and spoke with Mr. Punchard, who had a furnace alight, and was now abating the heat gently. With him there chanced to be Adam Zachary, and it happened that the thrower had a word for Porter's ear. He had seen him on the previous Sunday, and been ill-pleased. Forgetting the boy's nature and age, he now put ideas into his head that would not naturally have come there. Zachary possessed his own jealousies and anxieties, but he was one of those who, until now, had felt friendly to Porter. The attitude was changed, yet it appeared that he spoke in a friendly spirit.

"I saw you last Sunday," he said, "and now Punchard tells me you are to turn the string-wheel for the master. That's all to the good; only let me give you a bit of a warning. There was a chap here six months before you came, and he got in with the Easterbrooks, same as you are trying to do. He even went walking along with them. He was a very clever chap—older a lot than you—and the best flower-painter that ever came here. But he got above himself, and offered for Miss Easterbrook—wanted to marry her, with an eye to the future, no doubt! And the end of that was that he left with a flea in his ear. I tell you these things, because I'm very friendly towards you, and I'm very intimate with Miss Easterbrook and her great-aunt, and I don't want you to make a fool

of yourself and lose your job and your friends here."

Porter stared.

"Good Lord! the man must have had a proper cheek!" he said.

"No doubt; and you ain't far behind when cheek's the matter; but remember that there's a great gulf fixed between you and people like the Easterbrooks, and if they're so kind and think so well of you as to let you go out walking with them, don't you presume upon it. They do the like to plenty of others. This very afternoon I take Miss Easterbrook to Newton."

Porter was alarmed.

"I hope I didn't do wrong," he said. "Not for the world would I do it. I only want to serve them all I can. 'Twas them that offered to be friendly, of course. I wouldn't have dared to ask for it. Why, I'm only just turned eighteen."

"You're such a pushing sort of boy, and so old for your age, and so quick to take an advantage, that I thought you might be the better for a hint in that quarter. But perhaps I was wrong."

"I never dreamed of such a thing. Why, it would be cutting my own throat! But you've put me in a proper fright now."

"You needn't be that," answered Zachary. "Draw in, and don't be too friendly, and remember your place—that's all. Miss Easterbrook's wife-old, as we say, and nobody knows it better than her. And she's got her eyes in a certain quarter, perhaps—perhaps she hasn't. But go on pleasing 'em in a quiet, humble way, of course. Only don't presume upon the master's kindness

and get too easy. Easterbrook's a very jealous man in that respect. He'll be pleasant and intimate as he pleases; but he'll mighty soon freeze up if any of us tries to be friendly in our turn. Even I, who'll be head-potter in a minute—I always let him make the advance to me. He'll ask after our private affairs, and be honestly interested in our welfare: but we mustn't go into his, whatever we may know through rumour and hearsay, else he'd snub us very sharp, and it would be a black mark against us."

" 'Tis master and man, of course," answered Porter, "and nobody knows that better than me. But I thank you, Mr. Zachary, because I know you're closer acquainted with 'em than anybody, and I'll be careful not to be too easy like with miss; and as to think of offering for her—I'd so soon think of offering for the moon! I've never had nothing to do with girls yet in all my life, and haven't felt no interest in 'em. I see they are very easy to please if you praise 'em, and that's all I've marked about 'em."

"Don't you praise her, however, because that would be to put yourself as her equal; and if her father heard of it, you'd be sent flying."

George Easterbrook arrived at this moment, and Porter touched his cap, while Zachary said: "Good-morning, sir; fine morning."

"I thought you were still a Church of England man, Adam," answered the master; but the other confessed that he had fallen away.

"I was, while my old mother lived—for her sake, because she set store by it," he answered; "but now that she's gone, I needn't pretend any

more. I haven't got faith, and you can't be a proper Christian without it."

"You can't be a proper heathen without it, or a proper anything without it," answered George shortly. "I'm no preacher, as you know; but I've often thought upon the subject of faith and exchanged opinions with my partner, who is a deeply read man, and a Christian to the roots of his hair, and a greater thinker than me on some subjects. Faith is the life of all conscious creatures, so it's idle and mistaken of you to say that you lack it. It's as vital to an intelligent being as the air he breathes. Evolution breeds it into new shapes, and switches it off from one thing to another; but nothing can kill it. For why? It keeps pace with the brain as well as the heart of man, and is his guardian angel, if ever there was one. There's no beacon for us without faith, and if you look into yourself, though you find no faith in Christianity, you'll find plenty in something else. No man fights for nothing. Perhaps I could tell every man in these works where his faith rests. 'Tis part of reading character, and if you know where a man's faith is anchored, you know a great deal about the man."

The thrower listened to this homily with respect.

"I doubt," he said—"I doubt if I've got such anchorage. 'Twould be better for my peace of mind if I had, Mr. Easterbrook."

"For you it's coming—perhaps sooner than you think for, Adam. I'll tell you where your faith lies. It lies in what you'll do and how you'll shine when Body drops and you go to the

string-wheel. In other words, you put your faith in yourself. I don't say nothing against that. But lose no chance to see that you are worthy of your own faith. I've seen so many men put faith in themselves and been sorry for them, because they were trusting to a broken reed—as life proved."

He beckoned Porter, and they ascended to the wheel.

George Easterbrook perceived that Harvey had been at pains to make all clean for him, but he did not comment on the fact. He allowed minor evidences of this sort to accumulate without revealing that he had observed them; but they were recorded, not forgotten. He took off his coat, turned up his sleeves, and drew on a great overall. Then he went to a private locker and produced therefrom a few of his own tools of wood and metal, with a large diagram. It represented the various fundamental shapes of the classic vase: the great rounded amphora and hydria; the narrower, upspringing lecythus; the wide-mouthed crater and cantharus; the cylix, flattened to a dish; the lebes on its pedestal; the circular araballus; the jug-shaped œnochœ.

"There—look at those closely," said Mr. Easterbrook. "That's the scale on which a potter plays his music. They include everything that can be made on a wheel. The forms slide into each other, and the combinations of these forms are more in number than the stars, because they depend upon a limitless thing; and that's the imagination of man."

Harvey had taken off his coat and turned up his

sleeves. Now he regarded the outlines without speaking.

"In them you see almost every great, fine form that Nature can show you," explained the potter. "You might think that the world was full of beautiful outlines outside these; you might think on the calf of a man's leg, the round of a woman's bosom or thigh, the turn of a girl's cheek, or the lines of a hunting-cat or coursing greyhound; or you might reckon there was greater beauty to be got by the seeing eye from the waves, or the cliffs, or the clouds in the sky, or the shapes of the leaves and the boughs; or the flame in the fire, maybe; or the smoke curling out of a man's pipe. You might say in your first ignorance, Harvey, that these pictures here are far short of the stir and bustle of living and moving forms that fill the earth; but you'd be wrong. The men that made these things saw better and keener and farther than any eyes that have looked out at the world since their time. They were the most reasonable beings that the world has known; and they let nothing escape them that was worth keeping—from the twist of a shell to the shoulder of a mountain. You shall read about them in course of time. They were called the Greeks. Mr. Pitts tells that he has read here and there that all Greek art is dead, and the spirit that made it is dead; but only very silly folk can hold to that. Because their discoveries about the secrets of beauty go to the root, and only those who think the secrets of ugliness are better worth finding out will say that the Greek spirit is dead. However, to Mr. Pitts you must go if you want to learn about art."

The boy listened; but one word in this harangue had appealed to him with a force greater than all the rest, and that was his own Christian name. Until now Easterbrook had never called him "Harvey." To-day he did so, the word slipping out naturally in the midst of his discourse. And Porter knew, from his own experience, that one does not speak to a person by a name, if only a nickname, until one has often thought of the person by that name. He was gratified—indeed, mightily pleased. It seemed that the incident drew him nearer to the master.

Now the potter worked, while Harvey Porter responded with every nerve instinct alert to do himself credit.

Even he could see the difference between George Easterbrook's methods and those of Thomas Body. Here was no less reverence for the medium, but greater power over it. There was mystery and magic in this man's potting. The strength behind the delicacy was concealed, for the clay twined and curled, and seemed sentient and happy in his hands. It responded without visible cause, for Mr. Easterbrook's manual labours were less in evidence than Body's. Body appeared to be doing a difficult thing well; Easterbrook made a difficult thing look childishly easy. His pots seemed to ascend and grow like flowers off the wheel, while those of Thomas were the result of a process of laboured building. The clay now rose and fell as easily as a sea-wave; it expanded, contracted, swelled, shrank, bellied to an amphora, spired to a narrow vase, then sank again, opened to a cylix or narrowed to an œno-

chœ. And all the time it seemed to breathe and palpitate until, the last touch given, the wheel slowed and stilled, and the stately thing born of earth and water stood created and ready for the ordeal of fire.

"Life flows into it from the potter's palm and fingers," explained the master. "The clay is ready and willing; you feel that it is anxious to do your bidding and make swift and faithful response; yet the clay preserves its own qualities for all my handiwork. There's great dignity in matter, you must know. It obeys in the measure of its power, but it imposes its own conditions on the potter. If the ignorant or clumsy hand asks the clay to do more than it is able, it refuses. It can only respond within its own capabilities, and we who are skilled know them, and lift the clay to its own highest powers of expression, as the wise father trains a child gently to his finest possibility."

He worked a while, and then spoke again.

"There's this difference, however: a wise workman knows his own clay, but the wisest father don't know his own child, so that likeness breaks down."

He proceeded, moulding his own severe sense of beauty into one inert mass after another. There woke, as it seemed, a close, observant, taut sympathy between him and his material from the moment it began to spin and the ball was trued. A wondrous trinity of intellect, motion, and matter worked here together.

Easterbrook put it differently, however.

"There's three things go to making pots, just

as there's three things go to making all else," he said. "And they are matter, life, and mind. So at least I hold, though many wiser men than me deny the mind. But it looks like that to my eyes, and in the business of potting the matter's the red mud here; the life is the spinning wheel; the mind is the craftsman's, who brings wheel and earth together and creates the pot."

He finished eighteen pieces in the space of an hour, and when the work was ended he gave the boy a crumb of praise.

"You've done all that was needful. Joanna will be jealous," he said. "Now fetch me clean water and a towel, and tell me which you like best."

He pointed to the vases, and the boy would have given much to know what specially to praise. He considered, then he selected a bold piece of somewhat opulent and involved design. Mr. Easterbrook shook his head.

"Many will think the same, and many will think wrong. When many people agree about a thing, they're generally wrong."

Then he pointed to a small and severe model some eight inches high.

"That's the best," he said.

"What will Mr. Pitts do to it, 'sir?'" ventured Porter.

"He'll do nothing to it if I know him," answered the partner of Paul. "Anyway, I hope he won't. When Mr. Pitts happens to be properly pleased with a pot of my making, he doesn't touch it. That's his way of saying 'Well done!' to me."

CHAPTER VI

TOM BODY FALLS

DURING the months that followed Harvey's walk with Joanna, he worked steadily, and, as occasion allowed, began to learn more of the various departments and the special skill required in each.

Easterbrook would have been easier with him than was the case, but for fear that any unreasonable favouritism might make Porter more enemies than friends. The master believed that he was pursuing a policy of strict justice, and, indeed, he did so; but the extra sternness that some men might have exhibited, as a result of extra interest, he did not display. The personal factor intervened, and Porter attracted him so well that he liked to see the young man about him, and learn how he prospered. That this was reasonable Easterbrook easily convinced himself, for Harvey had made a start very much above the average. He was keen, quick, and capable. He had already invented a model that would make money for Brunel's Tower. To a greater extent, therefore, than generally happened, Porter was permitted to move with freedom through the works and study all the processes. He had tried his hand at painting, but swiftly abandoned the art, to the satisfaction of Rupert Marsland and some others. Rupert, indeed, never tired of tell-

ing how Porter failed; but he explained the reason justly enough.

"He hasn't got the nature nor yet the niceness for it," he declared. "Porter will paint a pot and perhaps two, and perhaps even ten; but then he gets impatient, and can't keep his mind and eye and hand all going together hour after hour. He's a very clever chap; but he hasn't got any balance. It takes a bit of a philosopher to paint 'ups and downs' for a week on end and not feel sick of 'em."

This philosophy Porter lacked. He had made one or two secret trials on the wheel, paying one of the boys a few pence to come and turn the string-wheel in the luncheon hour; but these were not attended with success, and he said nothing about them. Then he occupied his leisure time with the work of Mr. William Godbeer, the genial master turner, and he found his skill specially attractive and its results interesting. Godbeer himself was not easily known by his juniors; and he stood aloof from Harvey and took no interest in the boy, feeling that he had friends enough; but presently Porter made overtures, and Godbeer listened to him, heard the criticisms of others concerning him, and began to know him better. Of his keen desire to learn there was no question, though Godbeer doubted whether the art of the turner would be likely to hold him. It did, however, and whether the reason existed in William Godbeer's luminous powers of exposition, or in the intrinsic interest of the craft he practised, none knew. Porter, himself, might have offered an explanation other than these; but he could

hardly have defined the great matters moving in his mind at this season. A live ambition, a notable and honourable desire had awakened in the heart of the youth; but he kept it very close and only the time to come would show if his hopes lay within his reach, and what road thereto his own inbred character would inspire him to attempt.

For the present, liking Godbeer well, he gradually revealed more of himself to William than anybody else at the works; and he applied himself as time permitted to learn the principles of turning.

From the drying-room, wherein they reposed through eight-and-twenty hours after their creation, most of the pots and vessels came to the lathes.

“The thrower makes the outline and the turner makes the shape,” explained Godbeer. “I speak now of the rough-and-ready stuff turned out by the hundred thousand and not finished on the wheel. Of course, the very fine things—Mr. Easterbrook’s or Body’s best—don’t come to me. They are finished on the wheel and go straight to the decorator’s. But for the rough-and-tumble vases and teapots and candlesticks and so on, I shape. And there’s this great difference to keep in mind: the thrower always works from the bottom to the top; the turner always works from the top to the bottom.”

He explained the “chocks” and “chums” which fitted to the lathe and carried the pottery. He also showed Harvey his tools—simple pieces of soft metal into which Godbeer himself had cut the various profiles that he needed.

"I'm making teapot-lids for the moment," he said, on a day when Porter came to him with a quarter of an hour to spare. "You see they leave the thrower little more than roughly moulded lumps of clay; and then I set them on the lathe. Now watch."

The profile held in Godbeer's firm hand touched the spinning lid and in a second a ribbon of silky, red clay flew off. Then another followed and the lid took its form clean cut and distinct. Mr. Godbeer's place of work was red above and below. At his feet extended a mass of these fallen curls and shavings of clay, and from time to time a boy with a six-foot board brought him fresh teapot-lids from the drying-room and bore away those he had completed.

"They go to the damp cellar when they leave me," said Mr. Godbeer, "and from there the dippers take them as they want them."

But this Harvey knew, for at this season he was a dipper himself. The slip, made of pure pipeclay stained with various colours, was mixed in vats and transferred to buckets. Into this mixture the pieces from the lathes were inserted and one swift, circular motion coated their surfaces with an even dressing of the slip. They were thus prepared for the decorators, the slip making the background upon which they painted or wrote.

"For my part," declared Mr. Godbeer, "I take a good bit of pleasure in the colour of the clay itself, and you can put a very fine polish upon it without any help from the glaze."

He took his knife, revolved a vase, and working the steel blade from the lip of the vessel down-

ward brought up a bright and shining surface in the clay.

"Very kindly stuff, and bakes a beautiful colour without any help of anything," he declared.

Harvey's interest in this work grew; he spent considerable time with Godbeer by permission, and made experiments. The work delighted him, and though the shavings of clay flew wildly from the profile as he handled it, and now he cut too deeply and now not deeply enough; yet it was manifested to the expert that Porter might make a turner; and since Harvey at this stage of his career had a desire to be a turner, he was gratified and increased his application.

He approached Easterbrook with his ambition and the master, while now assured in his own mind that the youth was not destined for any manual craft, agreed that presently the young man should make the experiment he desired.

"Try everything. But first you shall try to throw," he said, ignorant of the fact that Porter had already made attempts in that direction. "We may find that these things are not your strong point, however. You shan't start the journey of life on the wrong road."

The serious attempts at throwing were delayed, however, and in his leisure Harvey watched and worked with Mr. Godbeer. In conversation with Zachary and Timothy Coysh, who made the tea-pot-spouts, William declared that Porter's power of learning was extraordinary.

"He swallows it down, and if he doesn't speak you know he's got it; but if anything ain't dead clear in his mind, he'll stop you till it is. And he

never forgets. I haven't met a youngster with such a cast-iron memory."

Coysh also admitted that Harvey was out of the common.

"He'd got all there is to teapot-spouts in half an hour," he said. "I don't mean that you want anything very out of the way in your brain-pan to master teapot-spouts; but he done it while another boy would have been looking at the moulds."

Zachary, however, was not so enthusiastic.

"He's showy; but I doubt he'll stand to work. He wants to do everything right off. He thought he could throw the first time, and no doubt he was very surprised to find he couldn't. There's something in him I don't understand. And I wouldn't say that he could be trusted very far. Perhaps George Easterbrook will find his swan's a goose yet—if not worse."

Then came a day with a mighty sensation, and the dark event fell out in the room where Zachary, Body, and the other throwers worked with Godbeer and the turners.

Porter was just leaving William to speak to Thomas Body, when the turner prevented him.

"Don't you go there," he said. "Mr. Body ain't very well to-day—has been a bit queer for the last week and he doesn't like talking."

It was true; the old potter had been unusually taciturn, though all could hear him talking to himself. The boys were frightened to turn the string-wheel for him, and whispered that he pulled fearful faces at the pots as he made them and constantly said all manner of fearful things.

Every man in the room cast anxious glances to-

wards Body, and one knew that the end could not be long delayed. Zachary, from his wheel, watched and felt a gloomy elation to see the promise of his desires.

Not five minutes after Mr. Godbeer had bidden Porter leave the old man alone, there rose a sudden shout and Body threw up his arms. He appeared transfigured, and his eyes gleamed out of his muddy face like fire. His hair was always wild, but now he brushed it with his red, wet hands away from his forehead; then he waved his arms and cried aloud, so that the naked walls echoed.

"God—I'm God—and you fools never knew it! I'm God A 'mighty, Zach; I'm God A 'mighty, William! World-making—see—see—world-making! Here they come tumbling out of my hands, great and small—great and small—little worlds and big worlds—to go through the fire till they be ready for the people!"

With immense rapidity he began plucking at a lump of clay before him and rolling the morsels into marbles of different sizes. He twirled them between his palms and then flung them about in every direction.

"Worlds — worlds!" he screamed — "great worlds and little worlds—good worlds and bad worlds—and me God, to make and unmake!"

The men were off their seats creeping towards him. But he did not mark them. He flung the pellets of clay violently from him, and some stuck on the walls and some on the ceiling. One hit Porter. Thomas rolled them with fierce rapidity, then he stopped and shouted again.

"I'll make and unmake, I tell you! 'Tis only

a God can do that. Here's a world that don't please me—there! 'Tis gone. I've crushed it—a world gone at a pinch of my everlasting thumb; and here's one I like well, so I'll give it an extra touch for the love of creating. A very good world. But I can make better. I can——”

Zachary was beside him, and others had also appeared. The din brought Samuel Punchard up the stairs from the furnaces below, and Jeremiah Tolley followed him.

Jack Ede appeared with a load of pots for the turners, and Godbeer bade him run to Mr. Easterbrook.

Zachary received a volley of curses at his approach, and lips that had never uttered a foul word till now blasphemed and poured forth filthy language. It seemed that the madman, in some sane glimmer behind his lunacy, knew that there stood one who would supplant him. But Godbeer and Tolley prevailed with him. He grumbled, but let them clean his face and stop his antics.

“You didn’t ought to come between your God and his creation, William,” he said, “nor yet you, Jeremiah Tolley. 'Tis a very busy business making worlds, and you be pushing yourselves forward a bit too much. If I was a common man I’d listen to you; but I’m God—I’m—I’m——”

He stopped and began to tremble all over. His eyes died out, like lamps extinguished. He recognized those round him, and stretched out his hands to them.

“What is it, mates? What’s the matter? Who’s in trouble?”

"You were just a bit excited, Tom. How do you feel now?" asked Godbeer.

"Queer," answered the old man, holding his hands to his head. "Something came down on me. I didn't do no harm? I didn't break nothing, did I?"

He alighted from his seat behind the wheel—the seat he would never occupy again. But he was jealous, and spoke to Zachary.

"Don't you go there! That ain't your place. Don't you let him go to the string-wheel, Tolley. Keep him away from it. He'd take the bread out of my mouth if he could. I know him. Never trust a man with hungry eyes like Zach's. He's—he's——"

He broke off and put his arms round Samuel Punchard's neck.

"Take care of me, Sam. We've always been good friends—you and me. Don't let 'em turn against me. I'm all right. There's no need for all this fuss—and wasting of time. Somebody caught me a whack on the head—that's all. I'll just go and sit down in the dark on the coals for a bit. Don't tell Easterbrook—no call for him to know."

But George Easterbrook appeared at this moment. He saw that Body was calm and rational again, and spoke accordingly.

"Why, Tom! They tell me you're not quite the thing this morning. How are you now?"

The sound of Easterbrook's voice made Mr. Body weep. For a moment he could not speak. His master patted him on the back and signalled the rest to go back to work.

"You do too much, old chap," he said. "I tell you again and again that we've got to slack off when we come to your years. But such a glutton for work you've always been! Come down into the office and have lunch with me. I've got enough for two there. Can you walk?"

"I'm all right," declared Mr. Body. "'Twas just something came over me. I didn't do no harm."

"Of course not—who'd ever think of such a thing? Take my arm and come and have a wash."

They went down the stairs together, and not until they were gone did the voices clash out behind them.

CHAPTER VII

THE MYSTERY

ENTHUSIASM, that precious gift of youth, now held Harvey Porter, and his master was the object of it. Clashing with his own nature, it prompted him to the display of great energy. But he was young, and while he sought to make George Easterbrook his exemplar in all directions, of course knew not enough of the man to appreciate the extent of his qualities, or measure their bearing on each other.

He saw that the elder desired to believe in him and was disposed to trust and befriend; and this alone had awakened the ardour of gratitude, but beyond that Porter perceived that it was no ordinary man who reposed this confidence in him, and the applause and interest of such a spirit as the master's induced a measure of pride and awoke some self-confidence in the youth. He argued reasonably upon the subject with Joanna, for his work now often took him into the paint-room where she and her great-aunt pursued their labours.

"If he believes in me, then I ought to believe in myself, miss," he declared. "And I do, because, thanks to him, things have woke in my mind that I didn't know was there. You want light before you can tell if a thing flashes. A diamond even won't glimmer if it's in the pitch dark. And

though there's nothing of the diamond about me, yet when I came into the light that your father casts round about, I sent out a bit of a spark, which I never should have done but for him. And though you might think it was beyond all reason for me ever to be any good to him and pay him back, yet still I'm hopeful of doing it, given enough time. I'm not going to leave it alone. I keep my wits at it, you know. And I shall bring it off one of these days."

"He's content for you to go on as you are going," she said.

"He is. But I'm not. I'd lay down my life for him."

She laughed.

"Men offer their lives to women, not to other men, most times," she said.

"I'd lay down my life for you, for that matter," he answered. "If I had to save you for him—or anything like that."

"You wouldn't save me for myself?"

"I'd do anything in my power for you," he assured her.

So it came about that he took counsel with himself how to do some great thing for Easterbrook, and since he was allowed often to see and listen to his master—on Sundays at the string-wheel—he began to study the character of his hero, in hope through that channel to win inspiration. But such work was beyond Harvey Porter. He readily perceived the obvious, but as yet lacked experience to build a synthetic whole of Easterbrook's characteristics. He knew that he was proud, but could not balance his pride against his

natural geniality of disposition; he knew that he was just, but failed to see how an enthusiasm or a prejudice sometimes set the balance quivering. Nor could he estimate the significance of Mr. Easterbrook's life upon his character, or weigh the relative strength of the strands of experience, the triumphs and failures, the joys and sorrows that had been woven into the cable of his existence. He knew now that his master was not a Christian, and he was glad, for his own nature rebelled against restraint; but he did not know that in matters of ethics George Easterbrook was far more strict than many who professed Christianity and were called Christians; and that his rational opinions imposed upon himself the need for self-restraint, self-command, and self-denial. Free thought to Porter's unfledged mind implied freedom in every other direction also. He had yet to learn that the only freedom possible to humanity is freedom of thought, and that reason plainly indicates and enforces the fact, while all experience illustrates it.

Mr. Pitts was a Christian and stood for the Christian ideal. On an occasion of a Sunday walk with the partners, Porter had listened to argument between them, and since their common interest in him was not clouded by any illusions, each, from his own standpoint, instructed the growing lad. Porter, therefore, found that while they differed as to the means—while Mr. Pitts held that man must seek help from supernatural sources, and the master contended that humanity must look within its own heart for its strength and sustenance—yet they agreed strangely in the issue,

and were at one in their rules of conduct and ideals of perfection.

"You're a Christian and don't see it, George," said Mr. Pitts on one occasion; whereupon the master retorted by assuring Mr. Pitts that he—Paul—was a rationalist and knew it not.

There came a Sunday supper to which Harvey was invited, and he went with joy and returned with doubt; because he heard clash of arguments and soon found that all this business of creeds and duty, of philosophy and the temper of the swords that man should use in his battle with life, bored him to distraction. The centrifugal force of youth was in his veins, throbbing to action rather than thought; while the men now past their prime and with the bulk of their lives and labours behind them, tended to be centripetal. They were closing in upon themselves gradually, unconsciously, inevitably, as the petals of the flower, which, having flung open their portals that the seed may be set and the life of the organism sustained, curl back again when age overtakes them and their death begins.

Porter did not understand the partners, and they did not understand him. He did not admire their theories of perfection, because, so far as he could see, they came between life and its full expression. There was that in his blood that rebelled at such a chastened and cautious rule of life; and because there had never been this lawless strain in the blood of Easterbrook he could not sympathize with it in Harvey. Mr. Pitts had also escaped from the distinction, but, unlike his partner, he had a measure of sympathy for Por-

ter in this particular. As an artist he possessed a sort of imagination that regarded lawlessness without frank repugnance; and while from Easterbrook, the pagan, one might have expected sympathy here and he denied it, to Pitts, the Christian, the spirit that Harvey now revealed by fits and flashes was not wholly bad. Paul admitted that possible danger lurked therein; but he held that danger was proper to youth—a needful experience.

"If you risk nothing, you learn nothing," he said. "The young should feel about and get off the beaten track our feet have worn sometimes. Else there would be no new paths pioneered into the truth of things."

"I feel to him pretty much as I should have felt to a son," confessed Easterbrook. "At least, that's how it seems to me. But there's a difficulty: a son, no doubt, would have been fairly close to my own pattern, and I should have known every sign as it appeared, and understood whether it came from me or his mother; but with Harvey, I know not what his father or mother may have been, or if he gets the nameless something I distrust from them; or if it's just the mixture of them have produced it; or if one might have to seek far back among dead men and women for it."

"That's your learned idea," answered Paul. "But I would say that each man, or woman, may be their forbears reflected, yet always with a bit added; and that bit is their very own and makes them themselves. Porter's folk don't matter. Porter's self is clever and strong, and he makes

you a burning and a shining light and puts you before all things. You're his god, and a very good god for a young potter you are, George. But this thing you fear in him—I feel about it that it isn't bad in itself. A train isn't bad in itself, so long as it keeps on the line; but let it jump the metals and then it makes trouble and is a bad thing."

"I don't grumble at his force of character," replied the elder; "I'm the last to do that. I like a bit of thunder and lightning in a young chap. I like them a thought short in temper and a thought hard in grain and a thought inclined to keep their lips tight over themselves. Let them be all that. But this chap—it's not his strength of character but his bent of character I'm concerned with. He thought a bit ago, because I wasn't a Christian, that I looked at certain questions differently from you. He eyed a thing or two that happened and he eyed it crooked. There's the pinch. He didn't see that there was only one way to look at it—your way, my way, my girl's way. He marked that a very clever thing had been done, and the cleverness pleased him a lot; but when I admitted the cleverness and thundered out against the wickedness, he was surprised. His surprise went to my heart like a knife, and I confess it."

"Yet I've heard you say that he's straight as a line, to your knowledge."

"But why? That's what I can't answer. Is it because he knows me, or just by accident, or only on the surface?"

"Don't be suspicious," urged Mr. Pitts, "'tis the cruellest thing we can bring against the young—suspicion. Give him credit. Moral values don't

come like the colour of your hair or eyes—by chance. They've got to be put in. The chaps that are called good by nature are generally good for nothing—just simple things, without the force or power to be anything but nothing. That isn't goodness; it's just chance. They are no more good than a stick in the hedge, or a lump of clay. Goodness has to be worked for and fought for. The light of Christ shines over stormy seas, and you need to be in earnest about learning to be good, as you need to be in earnest about learning everything."

"You go in the light of your own good heart," answered the other, "and though you are not colourless and good for nothing by a long way, Paul, yet you can't deny that goodness came easy to you. You were built so. With this boy the question I ask myself is this: Is his heart good? Is it a light to trust or a light to trim?"

"I'm a Christian," answered Mr. Pitts, "so you needn't ask me that question. Our light at best is darkness, and though there are sheep not of the Lord's fold on earth, yet all light that ever shone to show humans their road comes down from the Father of Lights—comes from outside and not from within."

"I withstand you there."

"You do; but you'll never convince me. The wise men—from the first news we've got of 'em down through the ages—were all lighted from without; and it made no difference to the fact that they thought the wisdom was streaming out of their own brains. You might so soon think the clay on your wheel and under your hands said

'How clever I am!' when it found itself turned into a vase. Your 'reason' that thinks it has broken away from its Maker—why, the very Maker it denies is controlling it and lifting it and showing it the new things! And your reason will find God at the back of things some day and prove it to your own satisfaction, as surely as my faith knows it without proof.'

Easterbrook shook his head.

" 'Tis my 'reason' that will knock your faith on the head, Paul, and show you what a piece of nonsense your God is, and how vain and empty and useless in the time of trouble. 'Tis reason that will make the ground sure under our feet and banish all these childish dreams of a new heaven and a new earth. 'Tis reason will make men believe presently what nature and common sense and their own eyes and ears and noses and fingers have been crying out to them, since they became conscious beings and knew they were born."

The men sat together on a seat above the sea in Watcombe while they talked thus, and at this moment Nelly Todd approached with a companion. The ugly girl walked beside a man and was evidently rather proud to be seen with one.

"This is Mr. Masters, our fireman," she said to George Easterbrook, and introduced a fair youth of five-and-twenty.

"I've heard from your father how clever Mr. Masters is," declared Easterbrook. "If you want young company, you'll find it down below, for Joanna's there along with Harvey Porter."

Nelly, glad of this information, sought her

friend and found her presently sitting on a red rock beside the sea. Porter was talking to her.

Nelly kissed Joanna and introduced the fireman.

"This is Mr. Masters," she said. "This is my friend, Miss Easterbrook, Mr. Masters; and this is Mr. Porter from Brunel's Tower."

They chatted, and Mr. Masters listened but said little. He was a short, square young man, with large, pale eyes and a sly face. He and Harvey began talking about their business while the girls discussed Mr. Masters. The men walked in front and Joanna and Nelly followed.

"He offered and asked if I'd go out with him," explained Nelly. "He's a very clever chap, and father didn't see any objection."

Joanna contrasted the physical shape of Mr. Masters with Porter's superior height and finer lines.

"I'm sure he's very nice, though a thought undersized," she said.

But her friend fired up at the criticism.

"We can't all be hop-poles. I shouldn't call him undersized. My father always says, ' 'Tis the size in hats that matters; not the size in boots.' '

"I'm sorry," answered Joanna. "I didn't mean anything rude. He looks a very clever man, I think."

"He is clever, though not a great talker. I said to him, just before we met Mr. Easterbrook, that he hadn't got much to tell about, seemingly, and he answered that it paid him better to listen than talk when he was along with me."

"So it does, you clever dear," answered Joanna. "And for certain he knows it."

"Does Mr. Porter talk?"

"Always at it, now he's got to know father and me and Mr. Pitts pretty well."

"Do you like him?"

"Yes," said Joanna, "I do, and I won't pretend differently. He's interesting. He's so full of ideas, and so full of life, and so clever! And whatever he was I'd be bound to like him, because he thinks such a lot of father."

"Well he may; your father's made him."

"He knows it, and now he wants to do his part and pay father back. He's more grateful to father than anybody ever was before. Of course, father's helped scores of young men in his time; but nobody ever responded so fiery and fierce. It's very peculiar with him and father—he's wild about father in a way. You wouldn't think I could get tired of hearing my own father praised; but I almost do!"

"He wants to make you think well of him, and he reckons the best way is to go on about Mr. Easterbrook."

"No, Nelly—he's not like that. He's pretty clever, and I believe he's cunning in a way—all terribly clever people have to be. But he's not cunning where my father's concerned, or where I'm concerned. He puts father first."

"Doesn't he like Mr. Pitts?"

"Oh, yes—he likes him and everybody, or seems to; and everybody's friendly to him—so far. But Mr. Pitts has different ideas from father, and they don't suit him so well. Perhaps that is because he doesn't know yet what father really is. Of

course, such a boy can't know the truth of a man like my father."

"Why do you say everybody likes him—'so far'?" inquired Nelly.

"Mr. Pitts said it, and I asked him the same question. Then he explained that success is bound to breed envy and a bit of jealousy. He knew father would be just, and only reward Mr. Porter according to his record; but he also knew that in strict justice he'd earn attention and get put over other people very likely. And that will make others go against him."

The men fell back, and, to Joanna's surprise, Mr. Masters took his place beside her, while Harvey Porter addressed Nelly. Miss Todd herself felt some astonishment, but the boy was cheerful and pleasant. Moreover, he talked, asked her questions, and amused her.

They advanced before the other couple, and Joanna kept her eyes on Harvey's back. She tried to talk to Mr. Masters, but found it difficult. He was a man of such extraordinary reserve and apparent modesty, that the girl wondered where he had plucked courage to suggest a walk with her friend.

"I think it was very kind of Miss Todd to come out with me," he said. "It's rather a come-down for her, in a way."

"I'm sure she doesn't feel that, Mr. Masters."

"I hope not, I'm sure."

"Are you fond of the country?"

"No; I'm all for towns. I answered an advertisement."

"But you'll stop at Mr. Todd's?"

"He's a very nice old gentleman, and very kind."

"Isn't Nelly nice, too?"

"It wouldn't become me to call her 'nice,' because that's too familiar. I feel very respectful towards her."

"Are you always going to be a fireman, or shall you go in for other branches?"

"No; I'm always going to be a fireman."

Mr. Masters mopped his brow and ventured on a confidence.

"It's a most curious thing walking up these hills brings the perspiration out, though tending the fires never does."

"Are we walking too fast, perhaps?"

"It isn't that. But it's a curious thing."

After a lengthy pause, he spoke again.

"How would you account for it, miss?"

But Joanna had pursued her own thoughts beyond the radius of Mr. Masters.

"Account for what?"

"My perspiration."

"Perhaps you're not used to hills."

"The cleverness! No doubt that's it. I'm glad to have hit on a reason. I began to fear it might be consumption of the lungs."

"You don't look like that."

"No, I don't."

Harvey Porter delayed to pick a flower for the other girl. Then Joanna and Mr. Masters caught them up.

"I've just given Miss Todd a bit of what you told me was Ploughman's Spikenard, Miss Easterbrook," said Harvey.

"And I think he might have found me something a lot prettier," declared Joanna's friend. "Some of the red berries yonder, for instance; but he wouldn't climb for them—too careful of his Sunday clothes."

Nelly was flushed and excited; Joanna felt amazed. For the first time in her life Nelly had met a man who had been more than civil to her, and the experience left a mark. It appeared to have acted as alcoholic stimulant.

When they parted, Mr. Porter took off his hat, but Mr. Masters did not.

Joanna felt mildly outraged at Porter's defection, but Harvey relapsed into silence, and soon interest took the part of annoyance in his companion's mind. It was clear that Porter felt no sense of impropriety, and did not dream that his talk of half an hour with the other girl troubled Miss Easterbrook.

"What were you chatting about so gaily with Nelly, if I may ask?" she inquired.

"About Todd's—the works. She's not a worker; but she knows everything that goes on."

"You pleased her—I saw that."

"Did I? She's easily pleased, I reckon. What is there about her that makes you so friendly to her, miss?"

"We were at school together."

"I expect you was a long way over her, though."

Joanna did not answer that Harvey had guessed correctly. Now he fell into silence, and was evidently deep in thought.

"We'll go back to father and uncle now," she said.

He awoke.

"I'm worse company than that young chap Miss Todd has picked up with," he declared. "I'm sure it's very uncivil to be so still. But I've got great thoughts in me."

"What are they, I wonder?"

He shook his head.

"I couldn't put words to them—not yet."

"Nelly's a cleverer girl than I knew, perhaps?"

"It isn't her cleverness—it's her—" He broke off. "Secrets are rude things, and I wouldn't have no mysteries from you, miss. You're the best friend I've got in the world after your father and Mr. Pitts. Only there's nothing to tell—it's just a sort of idea. You'll be the first to hear about it if anything happens."

The speech pleased Joanna.

"I don't want your secrets, I'm sure."

"I haven't got any yet."

Then she began probing for his thought. But he parried her easily, and they laughed together. She was in a happy mood when they returned to her father and Mr. Pitts; she was also a little excited, because Harvey made her promise not to report their conversation until they had spoken privately together again.

CHAPTER VIII

ADAM ZACHARY OFFERS MARRIAGE

ADAM ZACHARY sat at the string-wheel, and the work whereon he was engaged, contrasted with the matter in his mind, looked mean. A thousand vases of one simple pattern were needed. His gauges were set, and he turned out thirty of the poor things an hour. He could have made them with his eyes shut. Indeed, they were shut upon the outside world. He proceeded with his purely mechanical task, and, meanwhile, gazed inward with thoughts that seethed.

He had won his ambition, and now sat where Thomas Body used to sit. Every sign of the old man had vanished, and the special tools he loved had gone. Zachary affected cleanliness in his person as well as in his work. His finish was superior to the vanished thrower's: he left less for Godbeer and the other turners to do.

And now, as the conventional vases rose like magic by the dozen and were carried away on the six-foot boards, Zachary debated his great problem.

He had always intended to approach Joanna, and it seemed to him that the time was ripe; yet he hesitated, and ignorance fretted him. His temporal position, now largely improved, justified him in offering marriage, and his relations with

the family and the respectable conditions of his own family made the suggestion of an alliance with the Easterbrooks perfectly reasonable. On these points he was clear. But the vital question rested with Joanna herself; and it was here that doubt stormed Zachary and left him troubled. He did not perceive that this very element of doubt spoke distinctly; he did not understand that love would have long since dissipated this doubt and dawned with the light of a perfect understanding. Honestly he believed himself in love with Joanna, and in a sense he did not err; but the passion was adulterated with more ingredients than the potter knew. The issue now was merely a question of fittest time, and he could not tell whether he ought to speak, or whether he ought to wait a while longer before so doing. He had promised himself to speak when he reached the string-wheel and took Body's place, and now that had happened, and for himself he was ready enough to speak; but at each meeting with the master's daughter, though their relations were of the friendliest, there rose a doubt and a distrust. Strange though it appeared, the man could not help fancying that Joanna had been more accessible and readier to welcome his attention in the old days than at present. It seemed almost that with promotion to the first wheel and the responsibilities his seniority stood for, she ceased to interest herself in him.

With wits quickened, Adam Zachary watched her from day to day, and weighed to a word the significance of their chance meetings.

In another direction a supreme interest also concerned him, and that lay with Joanna's father.

Mr. Easterbrook's interest in Porter began to bulk seriously upon the horizon of Brunel's Tower, as Paul Pitts had prophesied it must, and while the large number of the workers, having nothing to hope, and lacking emulation and its complement of jealousy, felt no uneasiness before the spectacle, of necessity the head thrower was called to feel it. He regarded George Easterbrook's attitude towards the latest comer as a stupid infatuation, and would have been glad to see the bubble pricked and Porter away. He had wormed out the obliquity in the young man's character for himself, and been glad to find it, for well he knew the danger in that direction with such a man as Easterbrook. But no collision came, and the temper of the works, reflecting that of the master, continued friendly to Porter. Sycophants among the younger men marked the way of the wind and cultivated Harvey's good-will; others were indifferent; Zachary, with a growing inclination to dislike the youth, and a perfect readiness to clash in any fair quarrel, could find none. Nobody can be so frank and open, when it suits him, as a disingenuous man, and Porter's nature, subtly compounded of divers strains, was really good-hearted. He possessed a sense of gratitude, and his enthusiasm for the master, while it dominated all lesser interests, did not render him base or mean to his equals. He was quick to recognize friendship and respond to it; he was not vain; but he could not fail to see that he had become a favourite with Easterbrook, and his reigning passion and ambition was to pay for that immense privilege, not to profit by it. The boy was modest

and clever; and with such a one it is hard to quarrel.

Autumn came again before Zachary offered to wed Joanna, and he approached the ordeal uneasily. He was hurried into it by fears and doubts. For with September his mind had set actively against Porter. The old indifference passed through stages of annoyance and irritation to dislike. Then he grew jealous, and then he hated. Nor did he only feel an acute enmity to Porter. He was exasperated and indignant that Joanna should declare her interest in him. But that gathering interest, while not apparent to those who were themselves indifferent, smote Zachary; and while Joanna, unconscious that she tormented the potter, often praised Porter, and dwelt on his virtues to Adam, he smarted, and felt the stroke the heavier in that she did not guess at its delivery. Her interest was unfeigned at this season, and not until later, when it quickened and took a deeper colour, did Joanna feel the need to hide it from all eyes. But then it was too late.

Now, however, she would talk with animation of the youth, and guessed not whither interest was leading. And during such a conversation, Zachary, surprised out of himself, opened his heart and told her that he loved her.

Miss Medway was indisposed, and, much to her annoyance, her doctor bade her stay at home for a week. Thus Joanna worked alone, and opportunity offered. The thrower came to see her on some matter of business in the dinner hour, and she asked him to stop and talk to her and share her meal.

"I've got enough for three people to eat this morning," she said. "Mr. Porter was coming in, and so was father; but neither can, for father's sent him into Torquay on some errand, and father himself has been called to Newton Abbot."

He stopped, but did not eat.

"Can't be second guest," he said.

"Why not, Adam?"

"Would you like it if I said to you, 'Here, take this; another girl was to have had it; but she can't be here, so you'll do instead'?"

Joanna was silent for a moment. Then she spoke.

"I'm sorry," she answered. "I didn't look at it like that."

"I'm touchy where you're concerned," he admitted. "Somehow, since I went up top in the throwing, I've seen far less of you than I used to see. And I always hoped to myself that when that time came I should see more of you."

"You see quite enough of me, I'm sure."

"No, I don't—I couldn't do that. For my peace of mind, I want—"

He broke off.

"Now I am here, though only in working clothes, I may speak. And first—we've known each other a few years now, and I've watched you grow from bud to bloom, from a slip of a maid to a lovely woman. And you don't know or guess what it's been for me, and how your good was my good."

"I do know it very well," she answered. "You've always been high up in father's mind, and he's always praised you, and said what a

rare chap you were, and how lucky he was to have you here. And we all look on you as one of ourselves—so loyal and true you've been."

"That's all right; but that's all nothing. I've waited till now, though hard enough I found it; but it wouldn't have become me in my own opinion to speak before. But it's now or never—a question—just to ask what you think of me—if you ever think of me—if you'd like to think of me before everything and everybody. For that's how I think of you, and that's how I used to fancy you thought of me. Just vanity perhaps, and yet—until—until—at least I needn't drag another into it—I love you, Joanna, and long and true I've loved you. And though often enough I told myself a fine, rare girl like you would look higher than me, yet at times I took heart and felt warmer about it, when you were friendly and kind, and your eye brightened at sight of me. Then there looked to be a streak of hope in it."

"I've always valued your friendship, Adam. I've always looked up to you."

"Good God! I don't want you to do that. I want you to let me look up to you—and love you and work for you to my dying day, and make a rare nest for you, and be your proud and happy husband. That's been the dream of my life ever since—years and years."

Joanna felt too much surprised to speak. The proposal was utterly unexpected, for never had Zachary indicated that he cared about her. He was, of course, under the impression that he had done so, and believed that for some years he had courted the girl and made her appreciate the fact.

But his inexperience had held him back; his natural reserve had prevented any of those touches of thought and speech that might have conveyed his secret to Joanna. A maiden of her fashion, heart-whole and fully occupied, was little likely to read the dim script of Zachary's love. Only one thing would have served, no doubt, to quicken her perception, and that did not exist. For her regard towards him was very friendly, and no more. She liked him because her father liked him; and she took him seriously and spoke always in his praise for the same reason. But that she might marry him had never occurred to Joanna, and now, considering the question for the first time upon his invitation to do so, she felt almost faint before the idea of it. Adam was good-looking, and superior to most of her acquaintance in the matter of education; but he was fifteen years older than she, and she had always regarded him as belonging to another generation. The fact had contributed to their friendship, for she relied upon him, confided in him sometimes, and often expressed herself in a fashion that none of her own age would have won. And thus he had been misled into guessing that she entertained affection for him.

Her refusal did not surprise him as much as his proposal had surprised her; but it did surprise him in the light of the past, for Joanna lacked experience, and was in such haste to be definite and leave no loophole that she bruised the sensitive man with her choice of words.

There was an element of humour in her hurry. He saw it and smiled grimly.

"All right—all right," he answered, when she told him, with round eyes and fluttering breast, that it could never be; "you needn't go over me like a regiment of soldiers. You needn't rub it in. It wasn't a crime to ask, and I'm quite ready to take 'no' for an answer. Only don't look so frightened. You'll hear plenty of men offer to wed you before long, no doubt; and if I'm the first, I shan't be the last. I wasn't the first, for that matter."

"You remember the first," she answered; "and you're the second, and I'm sorry if I spoke uncivil, dear Adam. I've valued your friendship ever since I came here, and I'm sure I've always echoed father's praise and admiration. But marriage is different. I couldn't do that. I'm not the marrying sort. Somehow I've always seemed to know so well that I'm not the marrying sort. And to find you, of all the people in the world, think I was, knocked me right off my balance."

"I'm answered," he said. "You couldn't lie, and if you honestly believe you're not the marrying sort—a girl with your body and your mind—then 'tis clear as the summer sky that I've never touched your nature."

"Nor yet——"

She was going to say "anybody else"; but she did not. He had just declared that she could not lie, and to utter a lie in the same moment was unthinkable to her.

He perceived and appreciated the pause.

"Don't say that—you're right to stop there. 'Not the marrying sort!' Surely you've changed your mind about that since——?"

It was his turn to break off; but she did not answer, and he continued:

"I know, you see. Your saying 'no' to me have let in the light, and of course it isn't for me to warn you on the top of getting chucked myself. But yet I will—I will warn you, Joanna."

She flushed.

"I don't think you ought to speak so," she said.

"I warn you," he repeated. "I warn you with all my might and main. I know what I'm talking about, because your father's interests are my interests, and I'm very well content to follow where he leads; but I have not followed or read with his eyes there. It wasn't jealousy or any such thing, because I thought till to-day that I was stronger than him; and it isn't jealousy now, for jealousy's a fool's vice, and I'm not a fool. It's only thought for you that bids me say, 'Take care who you let into your life.' "

"There's nobody in my life, and it's all moonshine and nonsense, and you'd better mind your own business," she answered. "You're not thinking of me: you're thinking against another person; and that's a hard thing to do, and I wish you could have heard him talking about you not a week ago. He thinks the world of you, and praises you to everybody. And you've no right to hint that I care a button about him, or think about him, any more than he cares about me, or thinks about me. He does neither. He's a boy—even more a boy than his age. He's had a cruel sort of life, and never begun to live till he came here. And as for love-making and all that stuff, he's far

too young to bother his head about it; and so am I. All the same——”

A steam-whistle sounded, and the dinner-hour was gone.

Adam Zachary looked at her with an expression which indicated not only his own disappointment, but a sense of bitter amusement awakened by one aspect of this scene. In Joanna's haste to excuse herself, she had but proved the other's contention.

“I never named no names,” he said. “Funny, if there's nobody, and it's all moonshine and nonsense, that you put a name to the chap so quick, and knew exactly who I meant.”

Joanna blazed instantly and lost her temper. She had picked up a large plaque half-painted, and was turning from him to look at it. Now, at his ironical chaff, she swung round, redder than her own roses, and, to ease her anger, dashed the clay to the ground and broke it to fragments.

“Go!” she said. “And never speak to me again, Adam Zachary. You're a coward!”

He expressed regret.

“Perhaps I'm not master of myself for the moment. When you said ‘no’ just now, something put old Tom Body into my mind, all on a sudden, and I envied him. He's out of it—he's escaped reality for evermore, and all the torment and fret of reality. His life's only a dream now, and presently he'll dream away into death, where there's no dreaming. I'm sorry to God I vexed you. As you're strong, be gentle. It wasn't a minute to laugh, and I'm sorry I laughed. Nature plays tricks like that. When I was a little bit of a boy,

my mother used to say that I mixed up laughing and crying, and always did one for t'other."

Joanna melted.

"Don't say any more, or I shall cry myself," she answered. "You'd best to go, Adam. We'll let to-day be as if it hadn't been."

He shook his head.

"Can't do that. The scratch comes out in the firing. Only time knows what mark to-day's going to leave on you and me. I'm sorry, but it's certain."

He went out, and, when he was beyond earshot, Joanna locked the door of her painting-room and wept for a while.

CHAPTER IX

HARVEY AT THE WHEEL

LITTLE by little George Easterbrook revealed himself to Harvey Porter, and suffered the young man to creep nearer his confidence. The time came for Harvey to try his hand at the wheel, and, though he had already made private attempts, and the master knew it, these were not counted as a serious experiment, and Easterbrook expressed a wish that Porter should tackle the craft under an expert.

"I know you've had a try, and more than one; and I hear you didn't take kindly or cleverly to it," he said; "but that's nothing. My wish for you is that you get a general understanding of every branch of the work—throwing as well as the rest. There may be cleverness in you, but I doubt if there's any art. Still, no boy or man can tell what's in him till he's had a chance to find out."

"I'll do the best I know," declared Porter; and with his usual hunger to excel he set to work.

Fate, without a smile, decreed that Adam Zachary should be his teacher, and the spectacle of Adam hiding his heart and Harvey revealing his heart might daily have been witnessed in the throwing-room. The younger guessed not that any trouble clouded Zachary's mind, and regard-

ed the potter as a friend. He knew that Adam stood high in Mr. Easterbrook's esteem, and treated him accordingly. He did his best, but the elder won a gloomy satisfaction from finding that his tuition was wasted, for Porter had not the touch of a potter, and the work proved uncongenial to him, now that he had taken it up seriously.

The youth confessed his disappointment after a month of application.

"I tried all I knew," he told Joanna, "for, of course, the master, being what he is, thinks more of throwing than any other branch. But it's no use. I can't touch it."

"Can't Mr. Zachary get it into you?" she asked.

"No, he can't. Not but what he does his level best, and if I wasn't a fool, he'd have taught me the trick; but he can't. He says that I haven't got a potter's hand, nor yet a potter's mind. The clay won't bend to me. I only make a mess of it, and it's always wriggling and twisting away, and getting too thin. And though it's clean dirt, yet to me it is dirt. And I hate getting messed all over."

"I know you're very nice," she said; "but I never heard anybody here call the clay dirt. I might as well call my colours dirt."

"I know; and feeling as I do about it troubles me a lot; and I wouldn't dare mention it except to you, for the master would never forgive me if he heard it. It isn't that I am not loyal to the works. I'd do anything for the works. But I'll never be a thrower."

"Are you going to try painting?" she asked,

and her pulse quickened a little. But his answer was very definite, and stilled it again.

"I've failed there, too. If I could, I should have asked you to be so kind as to help me; but that's beyond my highest thought. Painting bored me worst of all. The master fears I've got no art in me, and so painting would be to waste my time and my teacher's. I've wasted enough of Zachary's time as it is, and he's been a very patient man with me, and I think the world of him."

"He's a rare good sort. No doubt if you could have learned, he'd have taught you."

"Yes, he is a good sort, and I'd like to make it up to him some day."

"You're always wanting to make it up to people for everything they do for you," she said. "You overdo it, because the large spirits take without fret of returning."

"I'm weak yet, and such men as Zachary and your father are strong—I know that," he answered; "but I'm not going to be weak always, and I've got a peculiar feeling about kindness and generosity. I'm glad to take it—thankfully glad, I'm sure—but I don't take it as a matter of course."

"The poor generally do. They take with both hands, and all they think of the giver is—that he ought to have given more. I believe the poor really respect the people who refuse them point-blank, more than people who give what they can afford."

"I'm not like that. I'm very grateful, and I know it's good to give, and I'd like to be able to give. But, of course, your father is the one and

only man in my mind. And if I thought I should never pay him back for what he's done——”

“You can't pay him back,” declared Joanna. “Nobody here can pay father back. Common folk can't pay such an uncommon man as my father. He's got gifts that raise him above all payment. Uncle Paul said that.”

Porter agreed.

“I know it. But I only ask for time. I'm full of ideas. I want to astonish the master—before anything in the world I want to astonish him. I don't believe I'm just a common, everyday sort. I may be, but I get thoughts, and I don't believe that common, everyday men get thoughts like mine.”

She admired him immensely, and the admiration stared out of her frank eyes.

“If anybody else talked like that, I'd say they must be very vain. But you're not vain; you're humble in a sort of way. And yet I believe, under that humble way, you're terrible proud.”

“I don't know; I never think about my own character,” he said. “I want to do things, and I'm always planning how to thrust forth here and there and leave a mark. The chaps here who talk about themselves, like Rupert Marsland and Christopher Ede, ain't the first-class chaps. The first-class ones never bother about their characters—they just push ahead for what they want and for all they are worth. That's how I am. I'm trying all out for what I want; and I won't let anything come between me and what I want, so long as I'm strong enough to keep the coast clear.”

"By fair means."

"I don't know anything about fair means, or yet foul," he confessed. "That's another thing that there's a lot of time wasted over—so it seems to me. Whether the way to a thing is right or wrong generally seems a matter of opinion, and I don't feel as if I'd care so much about the road as the place it leads to. I want to please your father more than any man has ever pleased him in his life. Of course, that's a mighty big want in a chap like me, with no education or nothing; but there it is, and if I see how to do it, I shan't waste time upon the sort of road that takes me there. A hungry man doesn't smell his victuals."

"You're that fearless and dashing, I know."

"I'm anything according to what I want. You can't be fearless and dashing at potting. But potting may be a means to an end. I've showed Mr. Easterbrook that I'm no thrower, and I fear he's sorry for it; but he knows I did my best."

Easterbrook himself, however, had not taken such an unfavourable view of Harvey's effort at the wheel. He pronounced the youth unequal and uncertain. He preached patience. He strove to make Porter a little more tame and easygoing, and allay his excitation under failure.

"You can't learn throwing in a minute, or in a month," he said. "I don't want you to work in this fashion—with pounds, shillings, and pence in your mind. Time is more than money, whatever you hear to the contrary: it represents other things besides money. Keep your mind easy, and give heed to your teacher. If you trouble about the waste of time, or the fancied need to make

good, you'll never succeed. I don't want you to be sordid, or look at everything in terms of cash —be it time, or clay, or life itself. I read a very fine thing in Emerson two nights ago, and thrust it into my mind to keep for evermore. It applies before all else to art and craft. He was an artist in words, as well as a philosopher, and he knew better what he was writing about than most men who write. He says this" (Mr. Easterbrook quoted from memory): "'A man is caught up, and takes a breath or two of the Eternal, but instantly descends and puts his eternity to commercial uses.' There it is in a breath. Don't learn only to earn. Learn for the joy of it and the feeling of power that knowledge gives. And if, presently, you know that no power over this clay will ever come to you, then throw up the sponge. But all in good time. Go on learning in a different spirit for another month, or more, till I come back; and then, if Adam Zachary can't honestly say you are going to be a top-sawyer, look round and see if you can conquer elsewhere."

Easterbrook was going away for a month or six weeks to visit his clients in the North, and he bade Porter remember that during his absence Paul Pitts would be in command.

"But the need for commanding must not be put upon him," explained the master. "All men know Mr. Pitts, and the man who would trouble him will not be found in these works. For that matter, even the gentlest spirits, such as he, must face their share of trouble. Fate and chance forget none of us. But man rises above the tricks of fate and chance—remember that. Man grows

more thoughtful for man than he used to be, but fate and chance hit us as hard as ever. They can't mend: they're just the same blind, driving, natural forces they always were. Mr. Pitts has got his hands full with Tom Body, who works in his room now, and with Miss Medway, my aunt."

Porter felt tempted to speak.

"I wish I was strong and had the power to be useful," he said.

"All in good time. If the spirit is willing, 'twill find its chances. Don't be too zealous. That's a fault that I've marked in you—a good fault, yet a fault, for it is to put the roof on before the walls are up. Slow and steady wins. You've no authority—even over them younger than you: remember that. Obey those above you. Be ever ready to put the weight of your shoulder behind your work, and the weight of your will also. I rule by trust, remember. But to do that a man needs to understand his fellow-men, and to trust him is the highest compliment one man can pay another. Seldom have I trusted in vain, or found it abused. So much the better is that for newcomers at Brunel's Tower, because they find themselves among men worthy of trust from the first, and they can model their own natures accordingly, and live and breathe in the atmosphere of honesty."

Porter took to heart such of these precepts as he was able to apprehend; but the points that George Easterbrook regarded as most important fell lightest upon his ear. That his zeal must be founded on solid knowledge and based on experience he readily perceived; but that any special ad-

dition to his ultimate value would result from mingling with the honesty of his fellows he did not believe. He was eager to learn what they could teach, and regarded each as worthy of cultivation to the extent of his knowledge; but questions of character left him indifferent, since his present values did not embrace morality in the abstract. He believed that he saw his duty to his master, and pure, disinterested fervour was guiding him in the education of that duty; but his duty to his neighbour occupied a lower plane, and was but doubtfully recognized at all.

Now, in the prospect of George Easterbrook's departure, Harvey's thoughts and ambitions ran along one way, and he considered only those points wherein he might advance the master's interests. Many things, he knew, were beyond his power; but he felt a sense of the confidence that Easterbrook had placed in him, and it imparted a stimulus to his imagination.

One paramount hope still haunted him. It was, however, of rather alarming dimensions, and the warning against overmuch zeal made him hesitate when he reflected upon it. Yet, so alluring was the dream that he would not put it away from his mind, and presently he began to consider it seriously, as capable of being realized. Despite Easterbrook's sermons, Porter was not deterred, for he could not as yet imagine the man capable of resenting means if the end were mighty enough. It was his natural bent of mind to set achievement high above agency and rate expedients of less account than their result. There existed for him no moral standards to come between him and his

master's advancement; and that, given results of sufficient splendour, Mr. Easterbrook would be found indifferent to the details that had compassed such results, Harvey felt quite certain. The master's moral opinions he regarded as a conventional habit of utterance, apparently common with all middle-aged and elderly persons. They did not carry the least conviction to his own mind, and he assumed that they were on a par with the other pious sentiments he listened to at church or chapel—a sort of decoration for Sundays, but not to be taken as a serious challenge before the inducements of real life to ignore them.

CHAPTER X

THE OPINIONS OF MR. PITTS

THE peace of Paul Pitts had been broken, for into his quiet studio had come Thomas Body. Perhaps none knew as well as the quiet potter himself how great was his trial. None, of course, had dreamed of making the suggestion; but when the question rose as to what must happen to Body, it was Paul who volunteered to let the old man occupy a corner of his own workroom.

Easterbrook protested, but Pitts was firm.

"We can try it, at least," he said. "To put him away would be very cruel, for he's harmless, as we've seen; and though he can't work, he can be happy messing about. He won't interfere with me—in fact, I dare say I shall be able to make him useful."

So Body, who continued to possess self-consciousness, found himself exalted to a place in the studio of Mr. Pitts; and he gave himself all a madman's airs and graces on the strength of this fancied promotion. He proved perfectly harmless, and was permitted the run of the works. His temper, often sullen and sour of old, had grown mild. He was always laughing, but he stood very much upon the order of his great dignities, and would be annoyed if anybody slighted him.

He often helped Mr. Pitts when in the mood to

do his bidding; but if he hesitated, then Paul would not ask a second time, but leave him to his lunatic devices. He had a corner in the big studio, and did as he pleased in it. He abounded in surprises, and was noisier than of old. At the dinner-hour he invariably took his can, and descended to eat his meal with Samuel Punchard and Jeremiah Tolley. Them he held his first friends still, and they were always kind to him. It was noticed that he never went into the throwing-room again from the moment of his downfall. He played henceforth with the clay, like a child, but did not seek the wheel. He tried to imitate Paul Pitts and model; but madness was welded into the clay, and Mr. Pitts secretly removed some pieces that possessed a measure of psychological interest. They closely resembled the modern work of certain men, for which immense artistic value was claimed. It seemed as though the mind of Mr. Body had lost all synthetic power, and in his efforts he would concentrate upon one feature of some animal or vegetable form, and express that with grotesque exaggeration at the expense of the rest. His moulding was undertaken without anatomical or other knowledge, and his figures reflected that primitive savagery wherein plastic art must have dawned. They suggested the outlook and the facility of a young child; and had they been presented to the world as the work of a modern school, they had most surely deceived many just and earnest persons, and been proclaimed as masterpieces.

Mr. Body happened to be in a useful temper on one occasion; and when Paul, who always took

the old man's rubbish very seriously, asked him if he could spare time to make a mould, Thomas decided that he could.

"We all know I can work just double the pace of anybody else," he declared, "and so I can give you a bit of time. There's none I'd so willingly serve as you, Mr. Pitts."

"I know it, Tom. I'm proud of you, and always was so. 'Tis just a plate, and none can make a mould cleverer than you, when you're in the mood."

"If I make a mould, I sing," declared Mr. Body. "I warn you of that. Sing I must. I can't work in plaster of Paris without singing."

"I like to hear you sing."

"And you always know this: 'tis my own famous song. I couldn't sing another person's silly song. I made the song and I made the tune—both out of my head."

"A very good, wise song it is, too," declared Mr. Pitts, who had heard it many thousands of times, for Body repeated his effort with the spontaneity and persistence of a bird in spring.

Now he took the mould that Paul handed to him, sized it with a brush, then cleaned it with a sponge. He mixed the plaster of Paris with water, poured it into the mould, and swept his hand round and round to get the stuff true and free of bubbles. Then he broke into his song, which he had composed in the first week of his madness. He sang in an old man's falsetto, and the tune consisted of six consecutive notes of an octave repeated, like a ring of bells. It was

gleaned from some village chime that had floated to his ear on many a vanished Sunday :

“The bud for the bullfinch,
The mouse for the owl,
The grass for the coney,
The seed for the fowl.

“The fly for the spider,
The tin for the pan,
The clay for the pot,
And the maid for the man.”

The mould was clamped with iron, to prevent it bursting under the strain of the plaster of Paris; and Mr. Body pointed this out.

“If my head had been clamped with iron like that, 'twould have been no manner of use. I should have burst out just the same,” he said. “I'm mad at times, I know; but I never mention it except to you and George Easterbrook.”

“That's nothing. We're all a bit odd off and on, Tom.”

“So we are, then; and nobody knows how mad a man is as well as he do himself. But he locks it up.”

“That's right. A thinking man often wonders in secret at the things that come into his mind.”

From the mould in five minutes emerged the model, and Mr. Body placed it upon a “jigger,” or spinning-plate. Next he pressed a pancake of white clay upon it, and, working deftly as he sang, soon had the plate completed.

“Well done, you!” cried Mr. Pitts. “I never hope to see a better.”

The other returned to his corner and his clay. Then came Harvey Porter with a question for

Paul. Some points had been raised in the throwing-room, and Adam Zachary left the decision to Mr. Pitts.

But authority was the last thing that the artist desired, and in this particular he wished the matter to go as Zachary thought best.

"Tell Adam to do what he's minded to do," he said. "'Tis a pity you didn't come along half an hour sooner, Porter, for then you might have seen Mr. Body make a plate."

"I make more than I unmake," declared Thomas. "A plate to-day, and a god to-morrow —'tis all one while the clay knows you for its master. Yet a god's a higher matter than a plate to a serious-minded man. God made me in His own image, and one good turn deserves another, so now I'm making Him in mine! Yet not in mine, either, for that would be disrespectful. No doubt He's very old now—as old for a God as I be for a man—but there must be some respect shown from the creature to the creator, and you may be sure I shall mark it. I always know the company of my betters."

He was pounding and pulling the clay and making a fantastic image as he talked.

"I'm making Him full of eyes before and behind," he said. "And He'll have a larger beard than me. But there's no nonsense about Him. He ain't in His Sunday best, like He always is in the picture-books and church windows. God's a worker, and His hands be stained with clay, and pushed out of shape, and scarred along of so many thousands of years of labour. And the stuff of stars be spattered over His blouse and His face.

And He's round in the back and gone in the loins a bit, and His holy eyes be growing dim, and His holy heart aches off and on at His many failures. He's getting terrible old, I tell you, and thinking of the time when He'll work no more, and take His rest. But mind this, you men: when He stops, we stop! When He knocks off, it's all up with us. The whole universe will fall to pieces and go to rack when He's done. So we'll hope He'll last our time, at any rate."

He chattered on, but cared not when they ceased to attend to him and talked between themselves. Porter loitered, for the things in this room always impressed him with a sort of awe. He told Paul Pitts of his work on the wheel and of a new ambition.

"Of course, I shan't say a word till Mr. Easterbrook comes back; but I'm pretty sure I shan't be any real good at throwing. I could do it—I can already—but I could never do it fine and in a way to be a credit to master."

"What are you after, then?"

"The turning. I've got a feeling I'd shine at that. It don't want a power of invention—only great skill of hand and neatness of touch. But I'm terrible afraid Mr. Easterbrook wouldn't be interested in me if I took up with turning, because he don't set much store on that."

"He sets store on everything," declared Mr. Pitts. "His purpose here is to fit the round peg to the round hole and the square peg to the square hole; and that's why he's a master of men. There's a lot of clever, miserable workers in the world, and they are miserable because they're do-

ing the wrong work, and their cleverness is hidden even from themselves. Mr. Easterbrook has a great art to find a man's cleverness and present it to him as a most precious gift. So go to the throwing, and if that isn't what you were meant for, he'll very soon know it. Mayhap you're not planned for anything inside these works, and, if it is so, my partner will find it out sooner than you do."

"If I can't be any good to him, I don't want to be any good at all," said Harvey; whereat Paul Pitts laughed.

"You'll be some good to him, never fear."

Then Porter talked on a little, for the elder had a sympathetic art to charm confidence. The young man revealed some glimpses of himself, and showed that beneath his imperturbable good temper he had nerves which could smart upon occasion. The discovery did not surprise Paul, for, as a student of character, he had observed that the rising generation was not blessed with the resolution and patience under difficulty that had distinguished his own. In his judgment a deterioration had set in that synchronized with improved education. He found the lads less stable, more excitable, more susceptible to slights and wrongs, more sentimental, and more jealous for leisure and pleasure. Porter told of some indignities and insults, and asked the other what he should do.

"My first idea was to get back upon them," he confessed, "and I would have a bit ago; but I feel different along with you and Mr. Easterbrook, and, owing to your high ideas and conversation, I'm a lot put about; because the way I want

to hit back would very like not please you or the master."

Mr. Pitts was curling the tail of a dragon round an Easterbrook pot, and he did not answer until his delicate operation had been completed. Then he spoke:

"That's interesting to me, because it bears out an opinion I hold, and it shows that a boy's surroundings go a long way to help or hinder his nature. Education has bad as well as good to answer for. There's a lot of difference come over human nature even in my short span. Wise folk say it don't alter; but you've only got to keep your eyes open for sixty years to see it altering. Men were a lot more self-possessed when I was young. For why? They hadn't got so much learning, and didn't let thought poison 'em. They didn't look all round a question so careful, or see how many sides every question has got. They felt as much as you feel, but they turned their feeling into action quick, before it went bad and did their natures harm. They'd have scorned to waste time suffering from their feelings: they made their feelings felt—felt by other people, and so had done with 'em. That's the healthy way. But you young men of this generation, along of superior teaching and the restraint that has come over manners and behaviour—you're always grumbling and always getting pricked, so tender do you grow. And you keep it in and brood; nothing comes of your troubled state but bad sleep and bad digestion. Nerves have grown to be the tyrants of the rising generation, so far as I can see. And what's at the bottom of it?"

"I don't know, Mr. Pitts."

"Number One's at the bottom of it," declared Paul. "Cowardice and selfishness are at the bottom of it. We bring up the children so feebly from the cradle nowadays that we teach them to be selfish; and selfishness is the seedbed of cowardice. Take your own case. You want everything for nothing, and the rose without grappling against the thorns. You've had the good fortune—or the good sense—to get your master's goodwill, in a way that's denied to most men until they've toiled many long years. They earn it with sweat and patience; you've won it by good fortune and the peculiarities of your character, which appeal to my partner. But look round and consider if we can see other folk win the prizes without an effort and not envy 'em. And envy will out and make its mark. You must rise above it, and show the others that your success comes of more than good luck. You must be patient and watchful, and plan how your own fortune shall help you to sweeten the lives of men less fortunate. And, above all, don't vaunt yourself, or show a consciousness of power greater than that of elder men who've worked years longer than you. 'Tis the hardest thing to forgive for some minds, to see the boy doing as well, or better, what the man has struggled to do before the boy was born. That's a bitter cup, and only a fairly large-minded chap can drink it without making a face."

Mr. Pitts poured out his wisdom, and Porter listened and gained useful knowledge.

Then came another grumbler, and Samuel Pun-

chard appeared. He carried half a dozen pieces from an oven that was just being emptied.

He looked round, then advanced and exhibited the contents of his apron.

"She's not here, I see, so I can speak—Miss Medway. Just cast your eyes upon these, and this be only a sample. There's five-and-twenty others as bad. 'Tis wasting oven-space and oven-heat and time and clay and paint and everything else. Something have got to be done about it, in my opinion."

He showed dismal examples of Sophia Medway's painting, and Mr. Pitts regarded them pensively.

"Strange to think that one who was such a clever work-woman should be able to do this and not know what she's doing," he said. "'Age creeps over her and takes away her sight and touch and sense; yet it doesn't do what we could wish and take away her deep-rooted love for work."

"'Tis no good talking about her behind her back," declared Samuel Punchard. "'Tis a case for straight speaking to her face, and somebody ought to do it. We've all got to be told things sometimes—women as well as men—and I hope you'll find yourself equal to it."

"I certainly shall not," answered Paul. "I feel this: it's a very painful thing; and for my part I could no more tell Sophia Medway to stop work than I could fly over the moon. But I grant that it's high time the thing was done. I'll speak to George Easterbrook when he comes back. I'm inclined to think that Joanna's the one to put this

right. But to do it without making trouble is going to be difficult."

"Then 'tis a choice of troubles," declared Samuel, "and in right and reason I say it's better for one old woman to suffer a pang than for the works to be going on doing this silly thing. She ought to have her eyes opened; and you needn't think 'twill crush her, nor nothing like that, because she's as tough as any of us, and she's got no pity for anybody else. In fact, she can see the faults of other people very clear indeed, and Godbeer had the edge of her tongue but yesterday, because she went to get some of his stuff from the cooling-shed and found its surface not to her liking."

"It's business that must wait for the master's return," said Mr. Pitts. "Put these things on the rubbish-heap, Sam, and let's hear no more about 'em. All the same, it will be a mighty difficult job for George to stop his aunt."

Mr. Punchard permitted himself a sniff.

"I'd never have thought there was that sort of feeling in the air at Brunel's Tower," he said. "What with Tom Body here making marbles and getting in the way, and Sophia Medway spoiling cloam, and—I suppose, when my turn comes and I'm past work, I shall be allowed to bide along with the kilns till I burn the place down some fine night and be found roasted to a turn in the morning."

Harvey Porter laughed out loud at this prediction of Samuel. He had attended to the conversation in silence, and found himself entirely of the head fireman's opinion. But, better than Pun-

chard, he gleaned the sentimental difficulties of the situation, and guessed what old Miss Medway and her activities represented in the mind of her nephew.

CHAPTER XI

THE ENERGIES OF PORTER

HARVEY PORTER now pursued with enormous industry the road that his peculiar genius marked out for him. He was ever ready to take impression and win inspiration from the least accident, while keeping his goal very clearly in view. For gratitude he longed to advance the welfare of his master, and the only problem that he considered was how best to do so.

His mind stood fairly steadfast for so young a man, and when one leading but nebulous ambition, which haunted it, grew more clear and came more close, he poured out all his energy thereon, and set to work with immense resolution to attain his object. Ignorant of the material on which he played, which was a girl's heart, Porter astounded himself with the swiftness of his progress. His desire was lofty and his ambition pure; but such was his character that he strove for these worthy objects disingenuously and cared not who suffered if George Easterbrook smiled.

He worked hard, and endeavoured, with success, to please Mr. Pitts; but Adam Zachary soon told him that he was wasting his time at the wheel, and Porter began to consider whether he might abandon the work before Easterbrook returned.

Then came a momentous meeting with Nelly

Todd, and it was followed by one still more important. They chanced upon each other at a glass and china shop in Torquay, whither Nelly had come from her grandfather and the young man with vases from Brunel's Tower. Their business done, they chatted together, and Nelly showed herself pleased to be in the other's company. Porter, with a shilling in his pocket, was gallant, and stood treat—an ice and a biscuit. Then she promised to go for a walk with him on the following Sunday. But he came to the meeting with less interest and pleasure than the girl, for he had told Joanna of his appointment, and asked her to come, too. And she had refused. Quick to read moods, but without experience to translate them, Porter had perceived that George Easterbrook's daughter was not pleased at this engagement. He could not tell how he knew this, but he knew it. And yet she had only laughed, and hoped that he would have a pleasant walk, and thought that since two is company and three none, she would not join them.

"But perhaps the fireman from Mr. Todd's pottery will come," said Porter; "then there would be four of us."

"The fireman won't come," answered Joanna, and left him. But no sign had she shown that she was vexed, yet something told Harvey that it was so, and he puzzled for the reason. At any rate, Joanna was not mistaken, for Mr. Masters, the fireman at Todd's, did not appear, and he only found Nelly—in a green dress, with a red flower in her hat, and a blue parasol—waiting for him at the tryst.

He praised her attire, and she was pleased.

"Why, Miss Todd, you're like a garden!" he said.

"Where shall we go?" she asked, and he suggested a walk upon the downs.

Perched on the sward above the sea, they sat together, and he made her a friend, and excited her exceedingly by confiding in her. They exchanged interests, but he did most of the talking, while she listened, with her pale lashes lowered, and her hands folded in her lap. Her white thread gloves made them appear larger and uglier than they were. A fire glowed in her thin bosom, and wonderful possibilities dawned out of the conversation.

"I've often wanted to put things to a friend outside Brunel's Tower," said Porter; "but I never thought I'd find a young lady to listen to me, I'm sure."

"I'm not clever, or anything like that," she answered, "but my grandfather's a very clever old man, and along with living with him, I'm a bit older than my age in some ways. My thinking parts, I mean."

"I'm sure you're terrible clever," he said. "No doubt, though you don't work in the pottery, you know all about it."

"I do the books for grandfather, and I help him where I can. He's getting old, and he's rather inclined to let things slide. He'll have to get in a foreman pretty soon."

"And a new turner, so I heard tell at our place. Mr. Todd wrote to Mr. Godbeer on the subject,

thinking he might know a man in his own business."

"That won't be for a year, however. Our turner—old Jacks—has signed on for another full year with increase."

"At the end of a year you'll want one?"

"For certain."

"It's a curious thing," said Porter, "but I believe turning is the job I can do best. Mr. Easterbrook is keeping me at throwing till he comes back, but I'm afraid I'll never make a thrower, and Adam Zachary says the same. He don't mince words with me, because he don't like me."

"Why not?" she asked.

"I can't say that. But you soon get to feel if a man is kindly disposed or not. He's done his duty by me and tried all he knew to make me get the hang of it. But I can't. It's all the mess and dirt about it, I believe. I hate getting fouled up to my elbows and spattered all over with the clay—just the opposite of Mr. Zachary, who thinks no more of it than a butcher thinks of a spot of blood. But I'm fussy and nice in those ways: I'm all for clean work, and so I've taken a good bit to the turning."

"I should feel the same," she assured him. "I couldn't bear to be messed up with clay."

"'Tis man's work and honest dirt, and I'm a silly fool to mention it, I dare say; and I wouldn't dare to mention it to a man, because a man would laugh. But a woman can understand better. All the same, I wouldn't have held out because of that. But it's very clear I shan't make a thrower. I haven't got the touch for it, or the understanding

of the clay. I don't get forwarder. You'll excuse me talking such a lot about myself—you're so patient, miss."

"Turning is very skilled work. Perhaps you may find you shine at it."

"I believe I can master it; and Mr. Godbeer has let me have a try off and on; and he says that I shape for it. And, somehow, if I ever thought I'd rise to be a master turner—but of course the thing couldn't be done in a year if I worked night and day."

"That depends on your cleverness," said Nelly. "I've known a chap at Todd's who could throw big vases in six months—born in him, you might say. And throwing's harder than turning."

"Your grandfather—" He stopped, suspicious that he was going too fast. "But it's just cheek my thinking of being any good in a year, of course."

"You are a wonder! D'you mean you'd like to go away from Brunel's Tower?"

He had been working for this.

"For God's sake, don't you whisper such a thing; but you are so lightning quick to read a chap's thoughts. I'm a very ambitious man, miss—I confess it to you. But I can trust you?"

"Of course you can."

"There's Miss Joanna—your greatest friend. If she heard, she'd never forgive me. But nature will out. I don't want to be nobody all my life."

"If you are going to confide in me, you must trust me," said Nelly.

"I would trust you," he declared. "I feel,

somehow, with you as I've never felt with anybody else."

"How?" she asked, not looking up.

"That's the puzzle. I can't put a name to it. But I feel happy. You was very civil and kind to me from the first moment you saw me, and I don't forget that. And if it's not rude, you've got a way with you that makes me feel trustful along with you. If I could make you feel interested in me, 'twould be the day of my life."

She laughed.

"I am interested in you, because you're proud and ambitious—as every young man ought to be."

"Not proud," he answered, "but ambitious, I grant. I'm fierce, really, though I hide it—fierce to be up and at the top. Brunel's Tower is all right, but I can't go very high there, and when I'm a master turner, as I shall be, if you say the word and advise it, then there won't be no room for me there."

She reflected before answering, for she felt prouder than she had ever felt before.

"I don't know you've any right to throw it on me like that," she said at last.

"Beg pardon, I'm sure; but I wanted to show you how much I believe in your cleverness. It's sudden to tell you these things, and perhaps, if I was older, I shouldn't do it; but in a queer way I've felt more and more, though we've only seen one another half a dozen times, that I might be able to interest you, because you interested me such a terrible lot. I hope you'll stop me if I'm too forward. Of course, I've no right to tell you my secrets if you don't want to know 'em."

"You don't seem to have any secrets," she said.
"No doubt you've told Joanna Easterbrook all this as well as me."

"No, I swear to God you're the first I've told 'em to, and will be the only one. And it's a great surprise to me how I can talk to you so brave and bold. No man nor woman ever made me talk so much before. Miss Joanna's different. I don't feel the same to her, and, even if I did, I couldn't tell her nothing, because she'd think the man who wanted to leave Brunel's Tower was weak in his head."

"Perhaps he would be."

"No, he wouldn't. It sounds queer, and I trust you not to say a word about it. In fact, I've trusted myself in your hands, Miss Nelly, because something down in me told me I could."

"You needn't be afraid. I'm wishful to please you."

"Thank you for that. So there it is. I'd like best in the world to master a branch of the business and come to Todd's and be a tower of strength presently to you and your grandfather. There—'tis out. And if you say, once for all, that such a thing is beyond my power, I tell you that it isn't, for I'm a very clever man in my way, though I say it who shouldn't. But if you tell me, on the other hand, that you wouldn't like me at Todd's, and don't think I'm the sort you'd wish to see there—then, of course, I'll say not a word more about it, and never think about it again. Your word's law with me."

With an intuition that is usually the outcome of sex instinct, but in his case sprang from different

sources, the youth thus deliberately won a woman, and while she saw one goal to his hopes, and felt the very spirit of romance pulse with her blood to her heart before his earnest eyes; while the tale of his ambitions and her power to help them mightily animated Miss Todd's soul, he planned an enterprise that she dreamed not of, and pictured results from this friendship that would have appalled her innocent heart.

And he was innocent, too, for in him stirred no sense that he entered upon improper undertakings. Difficult and dangerous his task must be; but he recognized no other standpoints for it, since all was fair in love and war. It pleased him to regard himself as a soldier about to enter into battle. He fought with perfect singleness of purpose for his fatherland, and his fatherland was represented by Brunel's Tower; his sovereign lord was the master.

As for this stupid girl, with a love-dream dawning and her heart already panting in sight of food, he thought nothing at all, and the words that he had spoken with such care were all directed to one purpose. He never considered the possibility of making her love him, for such an idea had been outside his bent of mind and present instincts. His hope was to interest her in him for Todd's; but the obvious possibility of interesting her in him for himself had not struck his own virgin heart. Sex had never yet complicated existence for Harvey, and he looked forward with eyes the clearer and more searching in consequence. He loved, indeed; but he loved a man with that en-

thusiastic and undivided worship a saint may be supposed to entertain for his Maker.

The girl and youth talked for an hour or two, and drifted upon general subjects; though Nelly always brought Porter back to himself. She fed on his confidences, but hid her own heart, and strove to conceal her interest.

Presently she invited him home, that he might drink tea with her grandfather and herself; and he gladly came. He paid her a few ingenuous compliments when in the presence of Mr. Todd; but he had expressly bidden her to say nothing of his secret ambitions, and she showed him how well he could trust her.

Indeed, neither spoke much, for Wilberforce Todd enjoyed to talk, and Harvey listened with all respect and very real attention to the potter's tales of his past.

When he had left them, he weighed up the significance of his day's work and was satisfied. For it amounted to this: He had established a secret understanding with Nelly Todd, and won her word that it should be kept a secret from every ear; he had pleased her and attracted her by the compliment of confiding—that he perceived; and he had taken the first step in an enterprise which, if successfully pursued, might advance the prosperity of George Easterbrook and the welfare of Brunel's Tower. He arranged to meet Nelly again and go for another walk with her. He also undertook to write to her, and she agreed to correspondence with a delight that she ill concealed.

Such was his nature that, going home presently, Porter longed for a real confidant, to whom he

might tell the story of that day and reveal the truth of it; but no such friend would he have admitted to his secrets, even had such a one existed in his life. For he was learning fast, and, while still quite oblivious to the moral duty of man towards man, yet had become conscious that his own attitude was not generally shared. This left him untroubled, for he suspected that while men professed certain principles in public, their private practice more closely resembled his own as a rule. But that there were men, such as Mr. Pitts, who ran their lives by another order of values and sought to practise what they preached, he also knew. Therefore, he kept his councils closely, judging that not until the end of his ambition was arrived at would it be wise to reveal the means. But the magnificent end attained, a natural jesuitry of mind, no more to be censured than the mingled blood in his veins, led him to suspect that the means would be ignored as of no account—a mere scaffold to be forgotten when it was removed and the splendour of the finished work revealed.

Thus he pondered, and then fell in with Miss Medway on her road to church. The old lady was clad in her best—a purple velvet jacket over a black silk gown. On her head was a black bonnet with a white feather, which she had copied from a photograph of Queen Victoria.

Sophia Medway stood not among Harvey's greatest admirers, for she knew whence he came, and could not forget it; but he had always been exceedingly polite to her, and she confessed no reason for her dislike beyond the incidents of the lad's past. Now, however, he forgot himself, and

gave her more than enough to think about. He permitted the exaltation of his present mood to take shape in a manner very terrific for the flower-painter, and plunged in where his betters had feared to tread. An inspiration woke in him, and he took a step which, on its face, seemed eminently justified; nor was Porter ever sorry at heart for the thing he now did, though subsequent events gave a sombre colour to the action. With the officiousness of youth, and led thereto by his guiding star—the good of George Easterbrook—Porter now dared to do a thing none had dared, and to put before Miss Medway an idea the significance of which, as seen from her standpoint, none could measure. But no sentiment controlled him; no imagination gave him pause; no native deference of young to old made him hesitate. Miss Medway and her feelings were nothing to him, and in this sudden attack he was only concerned for her nephew. He understood that there were things Mr. Easterbrook and Mr. Pitts felt not equal to uttering in the ear of the old woman; but he saw no reason why he should not utter them, and believed, even though his master might frown with his forehead, George Easterbrook would surely smile in his heart if the matter came to his knowledge. So he uttered the truth and rent the fabric of Sophia Medway's life from the top to the bottom in two minutes.

With some cunning he brought conversation to her work, while he offered to walk to the church-door and carry the lady's large-print prayer-book and hymn-book. Then, in ignorance, she gave him an opening, for she confessed that her eyes had

been weary of late, and she was glad to rest them on the seventh day.

"I know they have," he said. "Everybody knows they have, miss, because you've been painting so terrible badly and spoiling such a lot of things."

She started and stared at him; she stopped and regarded him with a flushed and frightened face. Then she grew pale, and moved on a step or two; and then she stood still again.

"What are you talking about?" she asked. "Do I hear you, or do my ears miscarry?"

"Didn't you know, miss? Then no doubt that's the reason why it goes on. Because Mr. Easterbrook hasn't got the heart to name it, nor yet Miss Joanna. But if you'll look on the rubbish-heap, miss, you'll be interested to see what a cruel lot of your work has to go there. It isn't even good enough to sell cheap for bazaars and suchlike, unfortunate to say. I'm sure you'll be cruel sorry when you know. But no doubt at your great, withering age you can't do better. In fact, they all say it's wonderful how long you've kept on."

The old woman did not answer. Her mind wandered before this attack. It crashed upon her, like the news of a sudden catastrophe, and she could not immediately grasp and weigh it. The horror evaded her as a nightmare evades the waker. She looked at Porter's hard, bright eyes, and perceived that he was interested and excited and quite unconscious of the agony he had inflicted. Then she grew suspicious, for the incident was unnatural. Indignation brought back to her cheeks the blood that pain had banished.

"Who told you to meet me to-night and tell me this?" she asked. "Don't lie to me, for well I shall know if you do. Who was it set you on to this?"

"Nobody—nobody, miss, God's my judge," he said, speaking truly enough. But then he finished with a lie: "And I'm sure that I wouldn't have spoke if I'd thought you didn't know about it. Of course, I felt as you'd understand what a lot of things is marred in the painting by you; but I was sure you didn't perhaps know how many. In fact, 'tis beyond belief, though of common knowledge. But a man here and there—I forget who it was—have talked about it to another man; and they all say you try to do what's more than possible at your age. And they say you ought to rest on your oars, miss, and leave off work, and pass your time sitting in the garden, and so on, and have all holidays for evermore."

"Past work—past work, then—me past work!" she said aloud, but to herself rather than to Porter.

"For certain you are," he declared. "Everybody says what a proper glutton for work you have been; but no doubt 'tis more than human nature can do to paint daffies properly at your dizzy time of life, miss. In fact, no doubt other painting ladies in other works retire years and years younger, owing to their eyes growing dim and their hands getting shaky."

"Give me my books," she said, "and be gone. And tell them that sent you they're cowards—cruel cowards to hit an old woman this way! I know—I know! They wouldn't dare speak it to

my face; but they send a common boy from the gutter to have me put out of the works. That's insult added to injury. I understand. I'll go. They want my room better than my company, and have hatched upon this excuse while my nephew was away. So be it!"

"I hope you won't take on, nor nothing like that, miss; because I've told you the solemn truth, and only the truth," he answered. "Nobody told me to speak, and if I'd thought it was wrong to speak, I wouldn't have spoke. But it seemed to me you must know it already. But if I did wrong, and if I must be punished for speaking, I'll take the punishment and tell the master what I've been and done the minute he comes back."

She took her books and regarded him sourly.

"I'll go home now," she said. "I'm out of tune for church now. I'm out of tune for everything. I'm out of tune for Monday now—the day I've liked best in the week, though most workpeople hate it worst. You hard, heartless, little devil! But—but I'll believe you—'tis better that I believe you. I can bear that, perhaps; but I couldn't bear it if anybody had sent you."

"Nobody sent me, and I'm sorry to God that I spoke. I didn't know that I was doing anything improper, miss—wish I may die if I did."

"Get out of my sight," she said. "'Tis enough I believe you."

"I hope you'll forgive me, too, miss," he answered, with his face rueful. "I can't see what I've said; but that's because I'm young, very likely. But if I've done wrong, I'm awful sorry for it,"

"You've done what you had to do," she answered. "The Lord oft chooses a fool to confound the wise. 'Tis a favourite trick of His to make the useless useful and the cornerstone out of what the builders rejected. And if He chose the likes of you to be cornerstone of my ruin and end—that's His business. There's a coward in it somewhere. I'm mazed—I don't understand—it comes back and back on me, like a death. I'll go home now."

"Do please forgive me, miss, and think no more about it. 'Twas just my impudence, but I meant no evil; I didn't think exactly how it might look from your point of view."

She shook her head, but did not speak again. She turned and went homewards, with her neck bent forward and her crooked back bowed, while Porter stared after her in mixed tribulation and pleasure. He was glad that he had opened her eyes; but he was very sorry that the operation had apparently caused so much pain. Then a passing fear got hold upon him that this matter would be known and he himself be roughly handled for daring to take so much upon himself. He had, however, traversed that aspect of the situation before, and doubted not that, his first annoyance over, Mr. Easterbrook would pardon him before the welcome spectacle of Sophia Medway's empty chair.

CHAPTER XII

DARKNESS FOR SOPHIA

WHEN Miss Medway returned home, she told her niece that she was unwell, and had changed her mind about going to church. It was not until the next morning that she announced her great determination, and then spoke in curt, North-Country fashion.

"I'm going to cut it; I'm through with the works. I ain't going there again."

Joanna stared in amazement, and could not believe her ears.

"You're sick," she said. "You must see a doctor."

"Not I—I'm all right. But I'm through. I've done at Brunel's Tower."

"You can't stop—you mustn't stop," cried her niece. "'Twill kill you to stop."

"No great odds if it does," answered the old woman. "We've all got to die of something—haven't we? If I've got to rust out and die of idleness—so much the worse for me. I'm through, anyway."

She did not go to Brunel's Tower again, and Joanna wrote to her father. Mr. Pitts also wrote. When that first long day was done, Paul and Joanna returned in some concern to Sophia Medway, and found her sitting alone with her hands

in her lap. She was silent and dreadfully depressed.

"What hast been doing all day, my old dear?" asked Mr. Pitts.

"Thinking," she answered. "I haven't thought enough in the past; but I shall have time for thinking now."

He tried to learn the reasons for her sudden and startling decision, but could not.

"I'm tired of it—that's all," she said. "I've been painting for sixty years. I've earned rest."

"And more than earned it," he assured her. "But I'm doubtful if you can drop out like this all at once without hurting your nerves. You come back to-morrow and leave off gentle and gradual—not all of a sudden. You'll miss the daily work too much."

"I'm through, I tell you," replied Sophia. "'Tis a loss to stop—I don't deny that. Take her power of usefulness from a woman like me, and there's nothing left: I'm no good outside the works, and only cumber the earth for evermore now. But I'm no good inside the works, either. My painting—well, least said soonest mended. I've cut a loss—for my own sake as well as the works."

They argued with her, but she would not be soothed. She was calm and obstinate. She looked older and seemed far more weary than was usual with her at the end of a working day.

Soon after supper she rose and prepared to retire.

"I'm as tired as if it was Sunday," she said,

and lit her candle. Then the first expression of feeling broke from her.

“Oh, my God—life’s to be all Sundays now!”

She sighed a deep, bitter sigh.

“Don’t you let this——” began Paul; but Miss Medway had gone.

Joanna discussed the situation with Mr. Pitts, and the girl was more sanguine than the man.

“I hope she’ll soon get used to it,” said Joanna. “It’s a very right and proper thing to have happened. I expected every day that dear Aunt Sophia would find out for herself what none had the heart to tell her.”

“There’s the puzzle,” declared Paul. “She never found it out. There are some things a busy man or woman never find out, and one is, when to stop. You need to do a pile of work before you get fond of work; and then, with many folk, like me and your father and Miss Medway, work becomes the life-blood in our veins and the air we breathe. Such people never can realize when the time comes to give over, and their senses and wits fail so gradual that they don’t know the old skill and touch have gone. That’s what makes me so terrible sorry for the old lady. She’s heard this from outside. It’s dropped in on her like a thunderstone and made her light-headed. But she’s taken it as bravely as need be.”

“She’ll drift back presently—to do light work and potter about, I expect.”

“No, she won’t—she’s not that sort. She’s cut the loss—so she said—cut the loss of all that made life worth living—cut it out of her heart.

We must be exceeding tender and gentle with her, Joanna."

"And patient, too," she said. "I can see a bit of what this means to her—though not as clearly as you can. But we must get new interest into her life and find something to fill her time. It's Tom Body over again."

"No, it isn't," answered Paul. "Tom Body's mind has broken down, and he goes on as happy as ever, and perhaps happier than ever. Your great-aunt—her mind is there, and she knows that it is right for her to stop. You can't hoodwink her into happiness any more, or blind her to think she's being useful any more."

"I wonder who told her," mused Joanna; "you'd think it was a piece of cruelty beyond human heart to plan. Maybe she overheard, or somebody blurted it out by accident and never knew what they'd done, nor guessed that she was so sensitive under her hard outside."

They strove to make Sophia Medway change her mind; but she would not. She took to walking, and went for long tramps through the lanes. She came home with bunches of wild-flowers. She had no friends to join her, and when Joanna offered to come, her great-aunt declined.

"You stick to your work," she said. "You needn't fear that I'll get into trouble—though I am twice a child."

She refused Paul's various suggestions as to how her days might be spent.

"I'll kill my time myself," she said. "It's kind of you to try to help, Paul; but you can't."

Then two things happened, for Mr. Easterbrook

returned from his travels, and Joanna learned the secret of Miss Medway's tragedy.

Harvey Porter was naturally astounded to find the results of his activity, and at first he was very fearful that the old woman would explain her reasons for stopping work. Daily he expected to find himself in trouble, for whatever Easterbrook or Pitts might think, he felt very sure that grave reprimands and rebukes would be his portion for such officious behaviour. But Sophia Medway told none how truth had come to her; and then, finding himself unsuspected, Harvey developed a desire to proclaim his action. The weight of it now bore heavily upon him. He heard from Joanna of the old woman's sorrowful existence, of her brooding and bitterness and dark outlook; and he perceived that Sophia Medway had taken to heart his words, and that they had served to keep her out of the works forever. He was uneasily proud of himself, and hungered for somebody to hear of his achievement and set his mind at ease by praising him.

He thought first of Nelly Todd, for she and he had become fast friends, and Porter, albeit quite inexperienced in such matters, could not fail to see that Nelly rejoiced in his society and greatly valued his companionship; but Miss Todd did not commend herself in this direction: he wanted somebody who cared for George Easterbrook and Brunel's Tower—somebody who would realize what a valuable and practical deed he had achieved by stopping the futile labours of Sophia. He did not want his performance to get to his master's ears, yet would have been happy to think

it might. He was frightened at what he had done, and also elated. Finally, after thinking of Jeremiah Tolley and William Godbeer, he decided that Joanna Easterbrook might best be informed. For she was a girl and could be dominated and made to keep the secret. Moreover, she loved her father, and would be quick to see the motives that had strung Porter to his deed.

Joanna had chilled a little in her attitude to Harvey since he began to take walks with Nelly Todd, and she did not invite him to her workroom as of yore; but he had not perceived this, and was unaware that he had troubled her.

Now, the day before the master's return, he came to her in the dinner-hour, asked to speak with her, and confessed how he was responsible for Sophia Medway's action. He began by explaining that her father had alluded to the growing difficulty; he then told how he had striven to help Mr. Easterbrook by mentioning the matter; and finally, he demanded secrecy from Joanna.

"Of course, I didn't think it would do what it did do," he said. "I hoped Miss Medway would turn it over in her mind and perhaps slack off a bit and not work so fast; for if she worked slower, she'd work better. You can't do things so fast when you get old, though you might still do the things all right if you'd take more time. But now she's chucked it altogether, and goes about with her neck bent, as if she was a sinner and under a curse. And it's dreadful for me, in a manner of speaking; but it's fine for the works, and a great escape, and twenty pounds a year saved, if not more—so Mr. Punchard says. But I came to you,

Miss Easterbrook, because I can't hide it no more. And it's safe to tell you, because you know my great feeling for the master and my great wish to better him for all his goodness to me. Only you'll not breathe a word about my part—for he might overlook the feeling that made me do it, and overlook the good result to the works, and just punish me for not minding my own business. Not that I'd mind any punishment short of being cast out."

Joanna was deeply interested.

"Mr. Pitts spoke truth," she said. "He reckoned that somebody had been at her. But he couldn't guess who, and certainly he'd never have thought that you'd dare to do it."

"Don't you tell him, then. Don't tell anybody. I come to you because I trust you and know you're true as steel and wouldn't give away a young chap's secrets. And I come to you, because you're the one of all others who will see that I meant well by this, and who will grant that I have done well. And only for your father I did it—all for him. And I'd do more than that for him. And so long as you know that my object was Mr. Easterbrook, and to advance him and save him trouble —'tis all right."

He made her swear not to tell anybody, and he made her admit that, though the results of his action were very sad for the victim, they must benefit Brunel's Tower and the master of it.

"I'm sorry for the old lady," he said. "But she's pretty well done for and will drop out soon. She's had her good time, and she didn't ought to be allowed to stand in the way of the works any

more. And if you grant that's right, then you can't be vexed with me, and can't turn round on me and give me away."

"The strange thing is that she took it like that, in my opinion," declared Joanna. "Knowing her, I should have thought she'd have turned round on you, and talked till your ears tingled, and then gone to my father, when he came back, and told him what you'd done, and had you packed off."

"There was a risk, but I chanced it, because the opportunity was good, and I knew I was right."

"She's told nobody—not a whisper. She never mentions you unkindly. Last night Uncle Paul was talking about Jack Ede, who's leaving and going to Brixham fishing. And then he talked of the young men in general, and said a good word for you. And Aunt Sophia said you were a clever boy, without any pity for the sorrows of the world, and would very likely do great things some day."

"So much the better that she's took me like that. For then she won't complain against me," said Porter. "And I'm very sorry if she's down about it; but she's old, and you can't let the old block the way. It isn't businesslike, miss. You didn't ought to put pity before business."

This conversation deeply interested Joanna, and in some subtle way pleased her. It was perhaps less the events confessed that impressed the girl than the fact that Porter should take her into his confidence. He had seemed to drift away of late and find his attraction elsewhere; but now he came back to bring these startling secrets; and any anger that she might have felt at his performance was more than balanced by her satisfaction that

he should have confided in and imparted the truth to her. Moreover, she came to believe that he was right; for a deed that had made her indignant to consider when the doer was hidden, took on a different aspect now that the doer and his purpose appeared to her.

Then George Easterbrook returned, and doubted not that he would be able to make his aunt alter her decision. But he failed. He strove very earnestly, first to learn her purpose in this sudden step, and, secondly, to bring her back to the painting-room; but she would not meet him. She declined to speak about the cause of her retirement, and when he pleaded Joanna as a reason why she should return to the works, Miss Medway advised him to engage another woman painter as her companion.

"I'm through," she said. "I'm done. My only shame is that I didn't find it out sooner—when you did, and Paul Pitts did, and a good few others, no doubt. 'Tis a sort of thing you ought to hear spoke gently in a kind mouth—not find out harshly for yourself."

She relapsed into a condition of saturnine gloom, lighted more and more rarely by flashes of interest or pleasure. She became very taciturn and spent increasing portions of her time alone. It was significant that she did not discuss the work of the pottery any more—never offered criticisms or took part in arguments. Indeed, there came a time when, if conversation drifted to Brunel's Tower, as it usually did, sooner or later, Sophia would rise and leave the room. But while the power was in her "to cut her loss," as she always

described it, she possessed no imagination to find new interests or make new occupations. Thus she sank into a sorrowful shadow that suffered dumbly, yet haunted her home, and made all therein sigh under a sense of remorse. None had wronged the old woman; yet all unreasonably felt as though they had done so, and were in a measure responsible for her woe. They found themselves powerless to lift her from her grief, and, in time, her misfortune took the place of Sophia's vanished work and remained as the new interest of her life. She fed solely upon it, nor guessed at the spiritual poison that must result from such mental food.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CLAY-WORKS

HARVEY PORTER, at the entreaty of Nelly Todd, asked for a holiday. The occasion was a very special one, for Nelly and her grandfather were going up to Dartmoor edge, where the old potter had business; and since the visit would entail sights of interest not unconnected with Harvey's work, it seemed good to Easterbrook that he should go.

He had not yet had a holiday, or asked for one, and he was not denied.

He spoke to Joanna, of whom he had seen little save at business since her aunt's retirement, and innocently she awoke a violent interest in Porter.

"No doubt it is about his business that Mr. Todd is going. I went once with Nelly. Every year they go to Cornwood by train. Then they drive to Harford and walk up the River Erme valley to some clay-works under Harford Moor. Two friends run the works—two elderly men; and they think a lot of Mr. Todd. But no doubt Nelly's told you all this and more."

"No—'tis to be a surprise," he said. His interest grew, and he began to wonder what Wilberforce Todd wanted with china clay. At Brunel's Tower the white clay was used for slip only, or in the making of the smaller pieces.

He wished that Joanna was coming; but she did not echo the wish.

"Two's company," she said. It was her invariable answer when he asked her to join him and Nelly on Saturday or Sunday. She hid her heart and was striving to get the lad out of it, for it seemed clear to her that his interest in the other girl could only mean one thing. For that reason she never asked him a question concerning Nelly and gave him none of the opportunities that he might have taken to explain a little of the truth. But, indeed, had she been inquisitive, he could not have said much, for his intuition seldom erred, and he knew that Joanna was like her father, and felt impatient of subterfuge or any devious dealings. He guessed that she was hurt because he had appeared to turn from her to Nelly; then he suspected that she was more than hurt, and felt a sense of insult that he should cultivate so stupid and ugly a girl, while he was privileged to approach Joanna. But though he longed to explain, caution silenced him. He consoled himself by looking forward and hoping that in time to come he would be able to put it all right with Joanna, if success attended him. Here, too, he erred, trusting to please Joanna by pleasing her father. Joanna herself he admired; but failed to perceive that she admired him; or guess at the extent of her regret when he devoted his first attention to her friend. She was, however, proud, and did not suffer her disappointment to cloud her life. She battled with it successfully and assured herself that her sole remaining emotion in this matter was shame—shame that she should have sus-

pected the young man began to care for her. She permitted the situation to make no difference in her affection for Nelly, and also resisted her own secret wonder as to what Harvey Porter had found to draw him so surely into Miss Todd's favour. For even this line of thought Joanna felt was disloyal to Nelly, and now she had entered upon a phase of peace and was contented to regard Porter as Nelly's accepted friend. She could not fail to note the effect on Miss Todd herself. The girl had grown so confident and so bright and cheerful. The new-born thing looked out of her eyes and put a new inflection into her voice. She was radiant, and life had taken on bright colours under this deep influence and interest. Joanna banished secret emotions and the beginnings of dreams before this spectacle. She accepted the situation at its surface significance, looked ahead and supposed that Harvey was hoping to win Nelly and presently marry her. The sordid side of such a betrothal, and the probable ultimate ambition of the man, she ignored. She told herself stoutly that Porter had fallen honestly in love with Nelly Todd; she asked herself why he should not do so. There was no just reason, and she accordingly accepted the position.

The holiday arrived and Porter set off to meet Mr. Todd and his granddaughter at Torre. Nelly carried a basket of good things, and she and Porter chatted cheerfully during the first stages of the journey. For Wilberforce was buried in his note-book. But when they alighted at Cornwood, and climbed into a little open brake that there awaited them, the old man grew communicative,

described the country to Porter, and called his attention to the beauty and interest of their way. Mr. Todd sat by the driver, finding that seat more comfortable than inside the vehicle, while Nelly and the guest were together behind him. Harvey sat beside her and once their hands touched out of sight, whereupon, obeying an impulse, he patted hers a moment. She turned pale and was silent for a long time afterwards.

Through the hamlet of Cornwood they drove, past a graceful cross that lifted beneath an oak; and then onward by hill and dale and farmstead, by water-meadows and streamlets, through woods and pastures, their road extended—so lonely that it was grass-grown in places. The lanes—survivals of old pack-horse tracks—had burrowed deeply into the hills, and often the subjacent lands were far higher than the road. Deep set in green lay their route, under hedges of hazel and polled oak, while the sides of it glistened with the green of ferns and sparkled with many flowers. Harvey plucked from the hedges as they trotted along—now a gipsy rose, now a belated foxglove, now a vetchling and now a ripe wood-strawberry. The girl, still very silent, with fluttering heart, smiled wanly on his gifts and accepted them. She put the flowers beside her, but he made her eat the little fruit. Mr. Todd pointed out the saliences of the land.

“Yonder lie Shell Top and Pen Beacon,” he said, pointing to the purple hills. “That’s Dartmoor above us, and the place is rich in potter’s treasures. You’ll be asking, no doubt, what them small mountains are that heave up round about

so white against the dark face of the Moors. Well, they're dirt dug out from the hills by generations of men. They're the rubbish from the clay-pits, for beneath them mounds you'll find signs and wonders, I assure you—pits of china clay and green lakes that hide old workings, and all the machines and business belonging to such things. The bulk of the fine clays from Devon and Cornwall go up to the Potteries, as you know; because Staffordshire has long used up its own stock and looks to the country at large for more. And though the Lee Moor and such-like pits furnish brave potter's clay, yet I learn that the Cornish stuff is even better still, and far ways the best in England. It makes the best porcelain we turn out."

He chattered on and explained the origin of kaolin, and its production from the decomposition of the great granite beds.

Harvey listened to the lecture with closest attention and asked certain questions which interested Mr. Todd. One problem that he submitted the old man could not solve.

"That's a very good thought," he said, "and I'd like to know the answer myself. You mind me to question Mr. Crispin, or else Mr. Fincher, where we are going. They'll be sure to know. There's a human use for everything in nature—so I say; and when men are grown wiser, they'll find it and there'll be no more impious questioning of God's object in making this or that. The world was built for man, and it rests with his wits to find out what everything in it is good for. Here, you see, he's thrown up those mountains of dirt

and thinks, in his ignorance, they ain't of no account whatever; but he'll find a use for them presently. They're only waiting for his wits to clear; and many another unconsidered thing will come into its own as we grow more understanding—same as radium and these new-found minerals. My father did his share in studying products, I may tell you—else I shouldn't be driving to Erme Clay-Pit at this moment."

Thus the listening youth was put upon the track of his hope, and his attention did not diminish, while Mr. Todd, garrulous and cheerful, discussed the constituents of granite and the virtues that might be hidden in mica, feldspar, and quartz.

"The Lord mixes, and according to His usual foresight and lovingkindness, He did His mixing long afore man came to find what He had mixed," said Wilberforce. "But He knew what we should want, so He got it ready, just as the boys get the clay ready for the throwers. And the peat, likewise, He prepared for the winter firing of the moor men, just as He grew the trees that made the coal measures long before He invented mankind. In fact, the trouble and time and expense that the Almighty put into this earth to make it habitable and shipshape for us ungrateful creatures is always a very beautiful thought to me. His goodness is properly staggering, when you try to measure it. He makes such a cradle for us as a mother makes for her firstborn; and we don't thank Him for all His love and watchful care any more than the baby thanks its mother for the breast."

Then Porter ventured to bring the old man back

to clay, and the gritty kaolins that appeared especially to interest Mr. Todd. The aged potter knew a great deal about them; but sometimes he stopped amid his disquisitions and left unfinished sentences in the discourse. These the listener noted, and hungered to fill the gaps, for there was an interest awake in him that the other did not guess.

They came to Harford presently, and Nelly and the young man stopped there, while Mr. Todd proceeded to the hamlet, that he might see Mr. Fincher of Erme Clay-Pit.

Nelly, who knew the place, took Porter into the meadows. Beside Harford Bridge they sat a while, where a feathery ash hung her foliage over the grey span and the stream purred and tumbled beneath—all black and silver among the moss-clad boulders. Ivy climbed the bridge and little ferns thronged the courses of the stone. The place was bowered in leaves, and round about the herb robert throve, with nodding foxgloves and pale umbels of angelica. The girl, proud of her learning, spoke concerning Dartmoor and its life and history, while Harvey encouraged her and expressed wonder at her information and knowledge. The instinct which never failed to help him along his road awoke now, and that he might hear of the things he desired most to know, he found himself entering upon closer relations with Nelly and opening his heart a little wider to her. His every word was spoken with a purpose, and one goal persisted constantly in his view, yet he was not acting wholly; he pursued a subtle way—half real and half pretended—and the result in action was

a measure of earnestness, gentleness, and unfeigned admiration that overwhelmed his companion. Young though he was, the boy's nature equipped him very completely for such an enterprise, and it wanted only the emotional situation of the girl to assure his success. He appealed to the obvious regard she showed him, hinted at kindred regard in return, and actually made himself feel it by talking about it. Led forward by a histrionic instinct, he spoke the unerring word and declared affection arising out of gratitude. The assertion so moved him, by its pleasant sound in words, that he began to suspect it must be real. She, of course, glowed at this advance and was very willing to exchange confidence for confidence.

The stream fell beneath the bridge in two spouts of crystal, where a rock divided it. Then the foaming torrents mingled again at a pool with many a flash and ripple, grew peaceful once more, and slid away under oily dimples, to reflect the sky and the clouds, the banks and the rocks that rose beside the river. The young man and woman sat where music-making Erme swept to the wooded valley beneath, and watched a kingfisher flash down-stream.

"If ever I rise to be good enough for Todd's and come to work under your grandfather, it will be a proud day for me," said Harvey; "and if I could be so bold as to believe that you'd like me to do it, I'd put all my life and soul into it and leave no stone unturned until I was there. You know that."

"I'd like you to be there—very much I'd like it," she answered, and his face shone,

"That's the best thing ever I heard said in my life," he declared. "I've got no secrets from you, Miss Nelly, and if you want me at Todd's I'll be there, so sure as God's in heaven, before a year runs out. I'll work night and day for it; and I'll be proud to rise up in course of time, so that you shall feel, and your grandfather shall feel, it was a good day when I came to the works."

A trout rose and they watched it.

"You're so clever that there's nothing you can't do," she told him.

"I'll believe it if you say so. I never knew such cleverness as yours, and if you say I'm clever then I must be. Anyway, you can trust me, and you knew that too. I wouldn't have asked the questions I did if I hadn't been straight and honest; and you wouldn't have answered them if you hadn't known I was."

She did not answer, and he spoke again.

"How did you know I was that sort, and good for keeping any secrets? Was it just cleverness, or did you feel like a sort of understanding between us?"

"I felt a sort of understanding," she confessed.

"I'm properly glad of that, because it was the same with me. I admired your character something tremendous first time you spoke to me. It isn't often that I want to please anybody and be properly useful to them; but that's how I felt to you."

They looked into each other's eyes, and Nelly cast hers down. She trembled and felt that she stood on the threshold of unutterable happiness.

"Would it be wanting too much if I asked you

to call me 'Harvey' instead of 'Mr. Porter'?" he said presently.

Here was a distinct advance—a symbol of the growing amity. But she asked a question before replying.

"How many other girls have you begged to do that, I wonder?"

"God's my judge, not another. I only know one or two young ladies. There's Miss Easterbrook, and Miss Appleby, that Rupert Marsland is going to marry—and you. That's all. And I never thought of asking them. If I'm too forward you'll say so; but I feel that I'd very greatly like for you to call me by my Christian name, miss."

"Then you'd have to call me 'Nelly'?"

"Not if you didn't like."

"I should like," she said.

"I'm almost frightened to do it," he told her. "It seems to bring me so close to the family, and your grandfather might think I was far too cheeky."

"Not him—if I liked it."

"I will, then; but not before anybody else for a bit."

"Before Joanna you can."

"How properly kind of you! But I always feel that happy with you. You're that understanding, and treat me better and kinder than I deserve, I'm sure."

"Perhaps I feel the same to you," she said.

He dimly guessed that enough was spoken for the moment, and changed the subject; but he used the new privilege and so shaded off the conversation pleasantly on her ear.

"What might Mr. Fincher and Mr. Crispin be like—Nelly?"

"Very nice men, both of them, and kindly too."

"You get your slip here, I suppose? We get ours from Newton Abbot."

"No," she answered. "We get ours from Newton, too, and we make a lot of white clay things as well."

"Your grand big pieces aren't white, though? The things that make us at Brunel's Tower proper wonder."

"Our special line, you mean. Of course Todd's would be nothing without them. But the red earth's the base of them."

"It's a solemn thought," declared Porter, "that when your grandfather dies, he'll have to give up the secret. I suppose he'll give it up to you, Nelly?"

"I know all about it now."

"Call me 'Harvey,' else I shan't dare to call you 'Nelly' any more."

"Grandfather's often wondered how such a clever man as Mr. Easterbrook hasn't found us out, Harvey."

"Thank you. Well, he's tried, for I've heard our Mr. Pitts say so."

"'Tis like many great things, grandfather says—simple enough when you know it. His father before him found it out—just a chance while he was making experiments after something else."

"A stroke of genius, I call it. I hope you keep very close on it? I'd be terrible frightened if I was your grandfather, that you'd go and let it out."

"I'm too clever for that."

"So you are then, of course. It's safe enough, come to think of it, for you're so clever at reading character that you'd always know where you could trust and where you could not. Even I know that you can't trust everybody these days."

She felt that it was her turn to advance.

"I'd trust you with my life, Harvey," she said.

The sound of her voice startled him. No girl had made love to him until that moment. He looked at her and saw she was excited and panting.

"It would be a sacred sort of thing to have another person's life trusted to you," he said. "But I'd rise to it—for pride and honour. I'd do anything I could for you, Nelly—there's not another girl like you in the whole world."

"Don't say no more—that's enough, if you mean it."

"You know I mean it."

He thought of kissing her, but he did not want to do so, and pretended with himself that it would be dangerous. He was, however, as tender and as gallant as he knew how to be. Nelly looked plainer than usual under the stress of her emotion. She guessed that it might be so, and made a further effort to please him.

"I'd tell you the secret, if you wanted to know it. I believe I would, at least. That's how I feel to you."

Something in him spoke. She had earned a caress. He ventured to take her hand in its white thread glove and hold it a moment.

"I feel queer," he said. "You're too kind to

me, and set too much store on me. You're a brick—you're a grand girl—too good for the likes of me a million times over."

"I care for you—you made me do it."

"Not so much as I care for you; and as to the secret—perhaps, some day, when I'm bound to your grandfather and to you—if that blessed day ever comes."

"It would be a blessed day for me, too."

To the relief of Porter, Mr. Todd appeared on Harford Bridge.

"There's the governor," he said.

"Then we must go. He'll be wanting to step up the valley."

"I've had a proper fine time, Nelly."

"So have I, Harvey."

"Please God, it's only the beginning."

She nodded, and he helped her down some stone steps from the meadow to the road.

"Mr. Crispin is at the works," explained old Wilberforce. "He's been a bit under the weather along with gout in the knee-joint; but he's all right again now, and up to the pit. So we'll eat our dinner on Tristis Rock, and then go up the valley."

They tramped the bank of the river northward, and presently climbed where a low tor stood on the western bank. Before them rolled the desert to the heights of Shell Top and Pen Beacon and the uplifted levels of Harford Moor. Here man had scratched the earth, and low white mounds began to lift—the beginning of a new enterprise. Its success remained in doubt; but far beneath it, where Erme wound away into the enfolding hills,

and where the shoulders of the heights descended to her green margins, old clay-workings appeared, and lofty wheels and a great chimney-stack arose beside ancient rubble-mounds.

"That's Erme Clay-Pit," said Mr. Todd. "It looks like a mole-hill from up here, but 'tis more like a mountain when you're alongside of it. A small but a thriving pit, with the clay handy to work, and everything going very regular and prosperous. Whether they'll do so well up on top of the hill is a question."

They looked aloft above the works to where feathers of steam billowed on Harford Moor, and a tiny engine, dwarfed to the size of a fly, crept over the waste and drew half a dozen little trucks behind it.

"They've sunk a power of money; and I hope, for everybody's sake, they'll see it back, and a good interest with it," declared the old man. "Easterbrook and Pitts are interested, for George told me so; but only time will tell if it was a clever bit of work or not."

Harvey looked up to the hill.

"I hope that great things will come of it, if my master's interested," he said.

"And so do I. Now let's have the basket and eat our food," answered Mr. Todd. The basket, which Porter had carried, was opened now, and they made their meal. It took but a short time, and then the potter lit his pipe and tramped forward, while Nelly and the youth circled round about, and made excursions to the right and left of the river. They played beside the stream like children, and then climbed again to look at a herd

of Scotch cattle that roamed along the hills. Nelly was frightened, but Porter bade her fear nothing, and led her close to little mouse-coloured calves that ran by their shaggy mothers.

They kept Mr. Todd in sight, and saw him presently disappear among the white mounds of the clay-works. It was then that they drifted into personal talk again.

A strange emotion dominated Porter. He judged now that he might easily win the great Todd secret from Nelly, who was ready to put her heart in his hand; but he felt suddenly averse from so doing. The secret, indeed, he wanted, and for the secret he had lived for many weeks; but he desired to find it single-handed without help from her. He had joined this excursion without suspicion that it concerned the great matter of the secret: that hardening process which rendered the Todd clay less refractory, and capable of producing the larger pieces; but now, from his own observation and a little that the girl and her grandfather let drop, he guessed that the holiday had something to do with it. His desire was to keep as near to Mr. Todd as he decently might, and now that Wilberforce had arrived at his destination, on pretence of wishing to see the works Harvey suggested that his granddaughter should follow. His desire was to discover, not to be told.

"I'd like best for you to show me everything, if it can be done," he said, and she agreed to do so.

"I will, then. I've known it for years and years, and Mr. Crispin's my godfather," she said. When, therefore, she had met the two old men who

shared Erme Clay-Pit; when she had kissed the stout Luther Crispin on his red face, and shaken hands with the tall and thin Anthony Fincher, Nelly conveyed the visitor away.

He praised her grandfather's friends.

"They be gentle old chaps," he said; "kindly and easy, like Mr. Todd himself."

She took him first to the kiln. A round chimney rose here, and beneath it were furnaces, the blast from which extended under a great stone trough forty yards long and a dozen broad. Into this, from a little lake on the hillside above, there oozed the liquid clay, and spread in an even flow of eighteen inches deep. The fierce fires beneath quickly dried it, and then it was chopped out in squares and piled at hand ready for the carts. A lofty roof covered the drying-pit—a long, high roof open to the air—and from beneath it the swallows darted, and came and went with cheerful twittering. The dry clay was of snowy whiteness, and glared where the sunshine found it.

They walked round the kiln pool, which stretched very stark in the midst of the heather; then Nelly told of more interesting lakes above.

"By the old workings, under the rubbish-mounds, there are proper little ponds of clean water with fish in them," she said. "These here are only the clay basins. It is poured down through pipes from the pits—all liquid. Then it settles here, and pours into the trough when they want it."

Aloft, under the great rubble-shoots, there spread other waters. Some had become almost clear, yet shone delicate and glaucous green, by

reason of the sediment in their depths. The mounds and heaps about them were tracked by little ways along which the workers tramped to the pit. Freshly turned débris still looked bare and grey, but older masses had welcomed the heather and the briar, the devil's scabious, and blue jasione, to hide their nakedness. The place was a wonderland for Porter. He confided his delight to Nelly, and thanked her warmly for bringing him to so interesting a spot.

"More interesting to us than you, however," she said.

He guessed at her meaning, and marvelled at her obstinacy in desiring to explain the purpose of her grandfather's visit. He found time, where they stood silently beside the grey-green waters, to wonder at her and puzzle about the movements in her mind. He felt almost sorry for her, that she could grow so excited and unwise. He felt also a little ashamed of her. She was silly when she grew excited. Remorse he did not know, for such an emotion was foreign to his nature; but something almost akin to it touched him at her volubility and feebleness. He understood that he was responsible for her emotions, and that she was ready and willing to put her head under his heel if he wished it; yet he felt sorry for her: he felt subtly sorry for her that he himself should be so contemptuous of her. How little she guessed at his contempt! She thought that he cared for her and was lifting her into a wonder; and he did care for her in a fashion; but only as we care for those we honestly pity. He had warned her not to speak too openly; but she would not be warned.

"It's safe with you," she said. "I'm telling you, Harvey, to show how I believe in you. I like to think you know it. It brings you closer to us."

"About your big pieces, Nelly?"

"Yes—the secret lies under your feet—or near them."

He was heartily sorry that his great adventure should end thus tamely. He felt as a hunter might feel who destroys his prey without danger or difficulty. He almost disliked the stupid woman.

They stood by the wide ring of green waters, on a little beach that surrounded them. It was made of fine, bright gravel, and marked with rings, where the lake had risen or fallen with flow and ebb produced by the rains of winter, or summer droughts. Above them towered a mighty mass of clay, streaked and striated all over its surface with perpendicular cracks; at the other side of the pond, a quarter of a mile distant, stood Wilberforce Todd and Luther Crispin.

"You see," said Nelly, as her grandfather bent down and scooped up a handful of the granite detritus that made the shores; "it's quartz, but more than quartz. A special by-product of the quartz—a quartz with an addition—and it works up on that side of the water. There's tons and tons of it. We're getting short, and we've come for more."

His eyes were on Mr. Todd, who now proceeded along the borders of the lake and lifted further samples from the shore.

"You grind it, I reckon?" said Porter.

"That's right. My great-grandfather found it,

before Mr. Fincher and Mr. Crispin came here. Then these works went bankrupt, and Mr. Fincher and Mr. Crispin took them over, and have made a small profit ever since. But there's no gravel just like this gravel. It's less than gravel and more than sand—so grandfather calls it. He has tried the material from other lake-beaches—at Lee Moor and round about; but it's different. This is the magic stuff."

"Mixed with the red clay at Todd's?"

She nodded.

"A twentieth part," she said.

He was quick to utter the right word.

"That shows what great store you set on me, I'm sure. It's a great compliment to be trusted so finely as all that. But why did you do it?"

"Because I feel as if you belonged to Todd's already," she declared. "You're going to work early and late to learn turning, and you'll come to us in a year, if I can help you."

"How terrible kind you are! I wish I could do something for you. But some day—when I'm strong——"

"It's your strength that draws me. But there—you'll think I'm not maidenly."

"I think you're a marvel, and the kindest girl that I ever saw. I didn't know there was such a woman as you in the world. I'm terrible proud to think you can be my friend. I'll make you glad that you was, some day. I never forget them that are kind to me."

"Don't say no more in sight of them old men," she said. "And best not tell grandfather that I've told you what I have. We girls are queer,

contrary creatures. I believe I only told you because you didn't seem to want to know. But I dare say you've forgot a'ready."

"I have almost. 'Tis nothing to me, except that it's good for Todd's and makes their work famous. I'm only proud to hear it because it shows what you feel to me."

Already his mind was busy with the tremendous task ahead of him. The girl had unconsciously flung away the faint interest she possessed for him. The white and shining substance under his feet was more to him than she could ever be again. But he tried to keep his eyes off it. They passed forward and met Mr. Todd and Mr. Crispin. Then the latter, who had taken a fancy to Harvey, climbed by a winding-path through a pass in the great white mounds, and Nelly and Porter followed him, to look into the clay-pit. Meantime, the girl's grandfather, having made his meaning clear, returned to the office. Porter was silent, for the unexpected fruition of his secret ambition had struck him dumb. Much remained for him to do; but the great difficulties had been almost ludicrously removed at a woman's breath. The absurd simplicity of the confession matched the absurd simplicity of the thing confessed. A natural product accounted for the mystery of Mr. Todd's huge pieces—his pedestals, his caryatides, and his jardinières. Anybody might avail themselves of the accident, for there was no elaborate process, nothing that one potter might claim as a privileged secret against another. Nelly had killed Todd's if Porter willed it so. Already he felt no further interest in Todd's, or those who

worked there; and when Miss Todd began to talk about him in his own hearing to Luther Crispin, the youth grew impatient.

"He's very clever, Mr. Porter is," she said; "and I hope he'll come to us as turner in a year or less. He's at Mr. Easterbrook's just now; but he's wishful to better himself before long."

"And why not?" asked Mr. Crispin. "All the same, George Easterbrook's a bad man to better, just as he is a bad man to beat."

"D'you know him, sir?" inquired Harvey, as Nelly followed her grandfather to attend to some figures; and the old man answered that he did.

"I'm proud to say I do, and a finer, cleverer person won't be found in the West-Country. He's a rare man, though we've never done no business together; but he's a lot interested in the new Harford Moor pits they are opening up over, and, if they prove all that he thinks, then he'll be rich, I doubt. But me and Mr. Fincher ain't so hopeful as he is. We know Dartmoor better."

"He's right for certain, sir," declared Porter. "Nobody ever knew him wrong. He never is. He's an amazing wonder, and where he leads, any man's a fool not to follow."

"That's all right," admitted the elder. "Mr. Easterbrook is a man a long way out of the common, and you talk quite proper about him."

Mr. Crispin, indeed, admired Porter's enthusiasm, and his unconscious power of pleasing was exercised anew.

The party drank tea with Anthony Fincher and his wife at Harford two hours later, and then drove back to Cornwood through the dusk. Por-

ter strove not to modify his attitude towards Nelly, or let her guess how swiftly the old interest waned. He had wit to see that he must be gentle here; but he did not know her mind, or estimate the supreme and sublime confidence she reposed in him. Her inexperience had exalted his friendship to love, and she believed that nothing but his youth, his humble position, and doubtful prospects prevented him from at once offering her marriage. She believed that he was too wise and too modest to do so yet; but she felt very sure that once at Todd's, she would so prevail with her grandfather that Porter would find himself in a position to offer marriage. She regarded herself as already betrothed to him.

The young man and the maiden each dreamed dreams, while Mr. Todd dozed in his corner of the railway carriage. But their vision embraced widely different interests. Silence fell between them before the end of the journey, and Nelly liked his silences as much as his speeches.

He expressed deep gratitude for their goodness when he left them, and declared that he had enjoyed the day of his life.

CHAPTER XIV

BANK HOLIDAY

SOPHIA MEDWAY's life of toil had kept her spirit sweet, and acted as a perpetual alterative to fight certain morbidity of temperament—a diathesis that must long since have plunged the woman into tribulation if uncorrected. And now the salutary, unsleeping friend was gone: she had kept her determination never again to enter the pottery, for, since she could not paint, she would do nothing. Every attempt had been made to soften the transition, and her nephew proposed lighter labours, which would put no tax on her abilities; but she declined the suggestion.

"I've cut the loss," she said again and again, "and I've cut away all that made it worth while being alive. You can't play with yourself—like a cat plays with a mouse. I'm through, and I'm not going to torment myself by pretending I'm working when I ain't. I'm not mad, like Tom Body—not yet."

George Easterbrook strove to learn what had thus suddenly determined her to take leave of work; but she would not tell him, and let him suppose that the truth had flashed through from within and not been thrown upon her mind from without. Porter ceased to fear that Miss Medway would tell the master what had happened, and

Joanna, at first in two minds as to his action, now believed that the young man must not be blamed. But while making no confession of the dreadful illumination that had lifted her ignorance and put a period to the interests of her life, Sophia Medway none the less made it clear to Porter that she did not forget. He came more frequently to the home of the Easterbrooks now—supped there not seldom, and spent an hour amid the family; but she never spoke to him or indicated by any sign that she recognized his presence. At first he had ventured civilly to address her from time to time; but observing her attitude, he ceased. Privately he questioned Joanna, who held her great-aunt's action not strange.

"It's natural," she declared. "Of course the poor old lady can't forget what you did; and the more she bottles it up, the keener it hurts her when she sees you and hears you talk. Most people would have made trouble for you and got you turned away for revenge, or at least tried to. Because, when you come to think of it, you did a pretty dreadful thing, though I've heard you say since that you never would have done it if you'd known how she would take it."

"All the same, the thing, though dreadful for your Aunt Sophia, was good for the works," he argued.

"I know; that's why I'm your side about it, and always shall be. But you can't expect her to feel quite so impartial. She saw that it was right for her to stop, and that's why she did stop, and was too just to do anything against you for showing her the truth; but she can't help remembering it

was you that made her stop; and when you think what a fearful thing it was for her to stop, and how it has changed her, and broken her, and suddenly made her old and wretched—then you must grant it's natural she shouldn't want to speak to you, or think about you."

He saw this, but was not satisfied.

"I've got plans and plots moving in my mind," he said. "You'd be surprised at the ideas I get; but now, next to pleasuring your father, I want one thing more than anything, and that's to get Miss Medway to forgive me."

Joanna approved the ambition.

"I know how you feel. It isn't you want to be forgiven exactly. She's forgiven you, I reckon, for if you hadn't broke it to her, somebody or something must have done so pretty soon. 'Tis an unreasoning feeling that she's got, I expect; and no doubt she knows it's unreasoning. But none the less alive and real for all that. Look out for a chance to serve her."

"I can't," he answered, "because no chance comes. If you think of it, I only see her now and again when I visit you."

He considered whether Miss Medway would go walking with Joanna some Sunday and suffer him to join them.

"I'd lie in wait," he said, "and turn up unexpected. And you'd pretend to be surprised, and I'd walk along beside you. She couldn't object to that."

But here the factor of Joanna's self thrust in. She was not so desirous to serve Harvey in this

matter that she could forget the personal aspect of what proposed.

"I thought your Sundays were full up.
not Nelly Todd."

He was dumb at that, for since the excursion to the Erme Clay-Pit, he usually saw the granddaughter of Wilberforce Todd on Sundays. Still the visit to Harford Bridge, their friendship had not waned, despite his efforts to cool off. His craft failed him a little at first, but he began to harden his heart now. He spoke often about Joanna to Joanna, and found the subject leave her. Its real significance for Miss Easterbrook he did not understand, but merely supposed that Joanna began to tire of Nelly herself, as he did. Now he blamed her for so doing. Poor Nelly's attraction bored him and left him with a sense of banal and ridiculous. His emotions were not troubled with any pains of conscience, for his heart soared high above such inconvenience. He even thought of telling the Todd secret to Joanna, but he doubted how she might receive it, and the present kept silent. Had he guessed what was in her mind, he would have spoken, and she might have been potent to change his great purpose of leading him away from the very dangerous girl where now he moved; but he did not guess. The line with Joanna had not been such that she could reveal a glimpse of herself to him; whereas with Nelly the case was different. He had won her heart and soul by the expression of his admiration. Nelly firmly believed that Porter wanted to love with her and let him see that she believed it. His words had led her to this conclusion, for

had ever flattered her before and her experience was as small as his own.

Joanna for her part felt no immediate willingness to aid the young man; but considering that his idea of meeting Miss Medway was reasonable, she arranged to let him do as he proposed.

On an Autumn day it happened, when the cherry rained her scarlet and the elm her gold. They met as though by accident under the Barton woods, on high ground two miles from Joanna's home, and Porter, bearing a few bright berries of the spindle-tree, came forward and offered them to Miss Medway.

"I beg you'll accept these beautiful berries, miss," he said; and then she spoke.

"It won't do—it can't be. My nature don't allow of it," she answered. "You've told this girl what you did—I've seen that much. She didn't tell me that you had; but my ears and eyes told me. And she's forgiven you—perhaps she thought you'd done a clever thing. I've forgiven you, too; but I haven't forgotten. I don't bear you any malice or anything like that; but I can't pretend that I'm going to be friendly or want any words with you. So don't try it on again—neither of you."

Thereupon Joanna signalled to the young man to go, and, mumbling some regrets, he departed as swiftly as possible.

He made no further effort to win Miss Medway, and begged Joanna to respect her wish and never mention his name to her again.

But then accident threw the youth and the old woman together once more, and that happened to

throw a fierce light on both; to reveal some of the strange buttresses that supported the character of Porter and show the crumbling architecture of Miss Medway's mind. He was rising to the exploitation of his strength and the display of its peculiar qualities—a sort of heartless inhumanity, common to youth; while she, the barriers down, was drifting to the inevitable misery that only her work had delayed. They were being true to themselves. He looked out at life with something of the spirit mirrored in the face of the faun of Praxiteles—an aspect neither good nor evil, but fraught with values that existed in a category outside human morals; she began to hate life and suffer from its monotony and its pain. For nothing now came between her and the task of living, or the suffering of unalloyed old age; nothing justified her existence, and religion—a weak force in her experience—was powerless to take the place of work and keep her spirit contented and at peace.

Not until six months had passed did the old woman's strength fail her under the strain of her altered life. Then a situation that had grown intolerable to herself and unutterably painful for her family was relieved, and she took steps to remove herself from the suffocation of existence.

On the Bank Holiday that followed the religious festival of Easter, it happened that George Easterbrook and Joanna had gone together to Exeter to see friends, while Mr. Pitts was away also in Shropshire, his native county. Sophia had long settled upon this season for her undertaking. Indeed every incident of it had been studied by the

old woman and every step considered to insure certain results.

She had relapsed of late into a pensive melancholy assumed to deceive her friends; for at first they apprehended danger from her dreadful sufferings when idleness fell upon her. But now her nephew and Paul Pitts, observing that she became more resigned and gentle, and even flashed out now and again into her former interest in passing things, supposed that time had medicined her and that peace was returning to her mind. No longer did they, or Joanna, fear for her; and thus she paved the way for her action and so designed to leave life, that those who knew her must ever suppose an accident had brought about her passing.

Upon the afternoon of the holiday, events fell out in this fashion:

Rupert Marsland, who loved of all things best to sit behind a horse, had taken his betrothed for a long drive and was returning upon the Newton road, when they fell in with Harvey Porter. Miss Appleby, who had suffered a most improving day with her sweetheart and felt depressed in consequence, welcomed the spectacle of Marsland's acquaintance, and Rupert himself was not sorry to show Porter another aspect of his own, many-sided genius.

He stopped, and Harvey saluted the lady.

"Jump up," said the driver, "and Alice can ride behind for a bit. She won't mind. She's been along with me all day. You've heard me tell you about my horse-driving—now you can see for yourself."

Porter protested against taking the front-seat, but Miss Appleby was only too glad that he should do so.

"I've had a treat all day," she said. "And I want to rest the small of my back, for this here board takes me just across it."

Rupert had hired a showy gig and a showy mare. The lovers were in holiday attire and the entertainment was going to cost money, as Mr. Marsland explained.

"One pound five, this bit of fun will run to," he told Harvey Porter. "But I don't grumble. We've had a very good day, and Alice hasn't seen anybody on the road that handled the ribbons better than I did."

"Or half so well," she declared. "Rupert don't touch anything without adorning it, as I always say, though I am his future wife."

Marsland's eyebrows rose; he assumed his haughty expression, and flecked the mare with his whip.

"I find myself in pretty good form," he said, "though I haven't been behind a gee-gee for a month of Sundays. But once a whip, always a whip. The touch is there. You want a hand of steel in a velvet glove with this mare. Everybody can't drive her. But Mr. Holman always lets me have her, because he knows that she's as safe with me as she would be with him."

He discoursed on the art of driving; then availing herself of a pause, Alice addressed Harvey.

"And what might you have been doing with yourself, Mr. Porter?"

"I've been for a long walk with William Godbeer," he said.

"How dull—wasn't it?"

"Oh, no, Miss Appleby! He's very clever at his business, and I want to learn about it. I like to hear him talk about turning and all the tricks of the trade. We walked to Compton Castle and saw the ruins. The apple-trees round about are coming into flower."

"Godbeer is a very good man on his own level," declared Rupert. "I never think a bit of a talk with him is wasted. He's a tame man in a way of speaking, because he never says an unkind word of anybody, and that's not true to nature, besides being very dull in conversation. But it's got its bright side in one way, because if you never have a dig at other people, they can't in fairness have a dig at you, and so a tame man, like Godbeer, never makes a fierce enemy. But then, against that, you may set the fact that he don't make a fierce friend either."

"I think 'tis better to have nothing fierce about friends any more than enemies," declared Alice. "Of course, I don't mean you, Rupert. Because a lover's different, and if a lover don't know how to be fierce, then God help the girl—that's how I feel, anyhow. But just in general life it works better to keep a sort of cool friendship. They fierce and fiery friendships ain't no good really—they always fizzle out and come to a bad end."

"I never would have them," said Rupert. "There's something in me that brings lesser men to me for friendship, same as Porter here came to me. But I ain't the sort to jump down any man's

throat. 'Tis half the battle of life to keep yourself to yourself. And with a dignified character, same as mine, it's second nature so to do. I never could hunt in a pack."

"You got the eyes of a hawk, and the nature of a hawk," declared Miss Appleby. "'Twas the hawk in you that took me, I'm sure. I never could have neighboured with one of them sheepish men."

Mr. Marsland nodded.

"That's right," he said. "I'm like that. Often and often at my painting, with the pots flying through my hands, I catch a bitter sneer on my lips to think of a spirit like mine flung into that place. And the people that go in and out stare to see me paint—no doubt they think in their minds that I'm just a common everyday man like themselves!"

"They little know," said Porter, who now understood the painter very well.

"There's secrets in Rupe that would astonish everybody," declared Alice devoutly. "Ain't there, Rupe?"

"Perhaps there are. I only know that I astonish myself sometimes; and it takes above a bit to astonish me nowadays."

"When are you going to be married?" asked Porter. "I'm sure you must both be very wishful to do it."

"In good time we shall be—and that's my time," answered Rupert. "Alice leaves herself in my hands in that matter. It will probably depend on when my mother dies. Or if the rise I

ought to get at Midsummer happens; then we shall have the wedding in September."

"He ought to have his rise; and nobody knows it better than he does," said Alice.

"There's one knows it better, or at any rate he ought," answered Rupert, "and that's George Easterbrook."

"You're so friendly and well thought upon that perhaps you know how it's going to be?" asked the girl of Porter; but he assured her it was not so.

"Only I'm sure I hope it will be; for Mr. Marsland's a fair wonder at painting," he told her.

Anon he left them, designing to take a short cut across the railway which would shorten his return journey to the Tolleys' home. For there he still resided. He praised Rupert's driving and praised Alice's hat, thanked them for the lift, and then alighting, stood and waved his cap to them as they drove on. Then he turned to the railway and was preparing to descend a grassy bank, cross the line and climb up the other side, when he noticed somebody below. It was a woman, and Porter recognized Miss Medway. She wore her Sunday clothes and was picking flowers in the tall grass of the bank. She carried some ox-eyed daisies and a few sprigs of sainfoin. He wondered whence she had come; then, remembering that a level crossing existed two hundred yards up the line, doubted not that she had strayed from there and rounded the bend of the railway unobserved. He watched her a moment, but kept himself concealed, for he did not wish to trouble her.

Sophia Medway appeared interested only in her

bouquet, but suddenly came the sound of a train close at hand, round the bend of the cutting, and she grew alert. To his amazement, he saw her walk on to the line.

Porter might have descended the cutting and dragged her into safety; but he did not. He was deeply interested and at the same time completely master of himself. The woman's intention appeared clear, for she went forward with her back to the approaching train. Then she fell forward and remained prone with her head over the rail. Still there was time, but Porter did nothing. His instinct forbade him to watch the suicide, but prevented him from interfering with it. He jumped away and hastened back to the high road. He heard the train whistle as it came round the corner, then he heard the plangent riot of its stopping and listened to the shouts of men.

He was not sorry for what had happened. Neither remorse nor regret touched him for his share in the tragedy—only immense interest, and wonder, and great admiration for the courage that could take leave of life in this fashion. To him, with life and its infinite possibilities ahead, the loss of it appeared an incalculable misfortune. He could not put himself in the old woman's place, or guess how little she had to leave.

The incident kept him awake that night, and he puzzled about trivial points. He asked himself whether he should tell Joanna what he had seen, and he decided that he could tell no living being. He began already to appreciate the differences in his values and those of other people. He knew that Joanna would never see the death of her

great-aunt with his eyes. Then he asked himself why Miss Medway was picking flowers, and the answer that he found increased his admiration at her courage and forethought. She had remembered that suicide is held disgraceful and redounds to the discredit of the dead and their relations. Therefore, she had planned to make her death appear a misadventure. Harvey much admired her for that and felt that it would be in the highest degree improper to upset her preconceived purposes. This discovery inclined him to elevate the dead into a heroine. For a moment he was almost sorry he had not saved her.

With the deepest interest he went to work next day and heard what had come to the knowledge of Brunel's Tower. For Joanna and her father did not appear.

It was believed that Miss Medway, while crossing the line, had been terrified by the sudden appearance of the train within fifty yards of her. She had stumbled, and since the train could not be drawn up, she had been killed. That she should be on the line and picking flowers appealed to those who knew her best as out of keeping with her character; but any suspicion in their hearts they did not voice even to themselves. Death makes the living irrational, and even George Easterbrook felt unreasonable sorrow before this tragedy.

“Accidental death” was the natural verdict. At the master's wish all hands from the works followed his aunt to her grave; and the elders—Timothy Coysh, Samuel Punchard, Jeremiah Tolley, Thomas Body, Adam Zachary, and William

Godbeer carried the coffin to the earth. There came, too, Mr. Todd and his granddaughter Nelly, with certain local women, who had known Sophia Medway and valued her friendship.

Many flowers covered the coffin; but the little bunch found in the dead hand Joanna kept as a treasure very sacred, and pressed in the pages of her Bible.

Harvey Porter beheld the funeral, and after it was over listened to his comrades discuss the dead woman, and heard Joanna upon the same subject. To his stark spirit, as yet unsubdued by the impure atmosphere of life, the general opinion now expressed came as a puzzle. From the same lips that had so often grumbled and growled fell nothing but praises. It reminded him of a saying in a wise book that Mr. Pitts had lent him, in which it was declared that a funeral sermon is like Cheap Jack at a fair: you hear all the virtues of the goods, none of the defects.

But he knew what impressed him as the greatest of all Sophia's virtues: her deliberate taking leave of life and the manner of it, so that none should suspect the deliberation. He considered again whether he might throw light on the great deed of the dead for Joanna's ear alone, but adhered to his original determination not to tell her. For two reasons he decided thus—because he believed the knowledge would make her sad, and because he doubted whether she would tolerate his own line of conduct. Relations between them were chilled, and he felt it without knowing the reason. He had secrets from her, and though they were but temporary secrets, he knew that she appreci-

ated their existence and suffered at them. His friendship with Nelly Todd had produced a measure of jealousy in Joanna—so Porter fancied. But he could hardly believe it, for it seemed absurd, and he had no vanity to support the suspicion. In one direction Harvey was relieved, for he had feared Joanna might be clever enough to see through the end of her great-aunt and charge it upon him. But this she did not do, and came to believe mistakenly with the rest that Miss Medway's death was a misadventure. Her young heart accepted this conclusion and clove to it, because she could not bear to dream of any other possibility.

CHAPTER XV

THE PEDESTAL

LIFE deepened Porter's experience and demanded histrionics from him, for he belonged to that order of men who neither think nor act after the manner of the herd. Such need guile, and must pay the price of their original outlook with a measure of hypocrisy so long as they depend upon the herd for their support, or until life breaks them in. Porter's environment began to tighten, but as yet he was unconscious of it. In one particular, however, he did not simulate. Admiration for his master was his religion, and he was loyal enough there. He regained his ground with Joanna, too, for after the death of her great-aunt she saw more of Harvey. Her father liked to have the youth about, and he was free of Joanna's home. He amused Mr. Pitts, for he was always reading in his leisure, while, so far as George Easterbrook was concerned, the lad had won him completely, and was grown much more to him than the master cared to confess. With Miss Medway vanished, there remained none to criticize Porter adversely; for Paul was also his friend, and doubted not that Easterbrook's influence and example would swiftly banish any defects of character that might belong to Harvey. The young man was working

now under William Godbeer, and promised to make a good turner; but his energies were not confined to turning. He studied the theory and practice of stains and glazes, and laboured at the chemistry of pottery. He did so for private reasons, because it was his purpose at this season to understand analysis, and present some foundation of knowledge for his future operations when the question arose.

He took Joanna Easterbrook to Cornwood, where Mr. Crispin promised him a welcome, should he come again. They made holiday there six months after Harvey's first visit, and he asked if he might take a sack of the white clay back with him, to make experiment of staining it for coloured slips. Mr. Crispin raised no objection, and when he and Joanna were alone and out of sight beside the green lake, the young man filled half his sack with the beach gravel, and covered it up to the sack-mouth with clay.

"I've got ideas about that stuff," he said; "but don't you whisper a word to anybody."

She long remembered that day, and marked Luther Crispin's obvious pleasure in Harvey. It seemed that men and women both fell under his spell. She was proud that it should be so, yet uneasy. He puzzled her, and appeared friendly one day and far off the next.

He spoke somewhat lightly of Mr. Todd and his granddaughter now, and did not see them so often as of old. But he was careful not to let Nelly perceive the shifting of his interests.

He had found out what a bore she could be to him, and he contrasted her with Miss Easter-

brook, to the younger's advantage. Joanna was better to look at, more self-contained and dignified, and clever instead of stupid. He began to feel indifferent to Nelly presently, and went less and less often to Todd's. He awoke violent sorrow and jealousy in the granddaughter of Wilberforce; but he did not know it, and thought he was cleverly choking her off. She gathered that his plans and ambitions were changed, and suffered unutterable secret grief.

As the time when his great stroke for Brunel's Tower drew closer, he ignored the Todds altogether, and for a month never went near them. Nelly wrote, but he did not answer; whereupon she lost her self-control, and, needing a comforter, took her troubles to her grandfather.

For more reasons than one, Porter desired to keep George Easterbrook in ignorance of the matter now in hand; but accomplices were necessary, and he chose Samuel Punchard and Joanna. To Mr. Pitts he did not go, for though he had studied, in order to frame some plausible theory on which to base his forthcoming experiment, he soon found that he could not learn enough to deceive. The quality of the gravel could not possibly have been discovered or guessed by him; and did he assert that it had been, the lie was transparent, and must instantly be detected, since he was able to offer no principle of deduction. His knowledge of the master had long shown him that truth was necessary in all communications with Easterbrook, and since he found that in this matter no untruth within his reach could be made to look like truth, Porter resolved on the truth itself when he came to be

questioned later. The truth was that Nelly Todd had told him the secret. She could not deny it. These facts, however, were not to appear until his discovery was complete, existed as a reality, and testified to itself. Joanna he parried; and since he pretended to hope but little from his experiment, she suspected nothing.

The gravel was duly and privately turned to powder in a little mill that ground the colours at Brunel's Tower—Punchard, working by night at his fires, undertook this operation, and Harvey himself assisted. Then came the mixing with the red clay, and this Harvey also did. The mass was locked in a cupboard in Joanna's room, and together, as best they could, they built of it a great pedestal, three times as large as anything baked until that time at Brunel's Tower.

The piece itself did not matter, for the test was merely for size.

"Even when it has shrunk," said Joanna, "our pedestal will be as tall again as anything we've ever made."

A great business it was to get the monster into the oven; but a placer, a friend of Mr. Punchard's, assisted in this proceeding, and the piece was safely stowed and concealed in the midst of lesser things for its first baking. Complete success attended it, and now Joanna painted on the biscuit, and endeavoured to make it more attractive. The form was clumsy, for it had been modelled by unskilled hands; but the majestic size satisfied the conspirators, and Joanna felt her reverence grow for Harvey. He was a genius, it seemed, as well as a fascinating young man.

Porter felt very nervous and ill at ease until the second firing. Mr. Punchard himself introduced the treasure into a kiln after hours before he bricked it up, and it was he who brought it forth again afterward. It reappeared sound in every respect, and though the glaze had failed in the hurry of a secret dipping, Joanna's red roses flashed out brightly where they trailed round the pedestal. The piece weighed twenty pounds, and after firing stood four and a half feet high and rang like a bell.

The mystery of this creation escaped at length, and was breathed through the works, for the existence of such a thing could not be kept wholly unknown; but neither George Easterbrook nor Paul Pitts heard anything of it, until there came a dinner-hour when Joanna invited them both into her room, drew a cloth from the wonder, and exhibited it before their astonished eyes. Her father asked whence it had come, and Joanna told him it had been made in the works. He examined it inch by inch, while Mr. Pitts scrutinized a fragment of the unbaked clay from which it had been made. Its texture spoke of something unknown to his delicate fingers.

"What's in it
answered:

"Mr. Porter
knows."

Her father still
partially hollow,
when struck.

"This is Todd

"Then it's death to Todd's," answered his partner quietly.

They sent for Porter, but he did not come. He knew the hour when Joanna was to exhibit the pedestal, and contrived to be absent at the time, on a duty that took him from the works for the rest of the day. He desired to let the significance of his discovery be impressed upon George Easterbrook before he appeared. He did not want his valiant stroke for Brunel's Tower to be undervalued; but far greater than the achievement itself was to be the pride and satisfaction awakened in the master. Joanna, close in his confidence, obeyed his direction, and saw him privately that night. He was greedy for the news, and she described her father's astonishment, interest, and ultimate enthusiasm.

"He couldn't believe his eyes at first; but somehow he seemed to know it was you before I told him. He felt anxious for a moment; then, when he knew it was really you, he looked like the sun coming from behind a cloud. You're to see him to-morrow morning at eight o'clock."

In his joy Harvey covered Joanna with praises.

"It's all your cleverness that we brought it off," he said, "and quite as much thanks to you as me! Now we shall make big pieces—pieces as big as Todd's, only a million times better. So he'll have to give up, I reckon, and sell his little show to your father."

"That's the only thing that made father a bit thoughtful," declared Joanna. "Of course he and Uncle Paul saw like a flash that this discovery of yours pretty well did for poor Mr. Todd. But

since he's so old, I expect they'll be generous and buy him out, so as not to hurt his feelings."

"I should think he would be very glad—though there's nothing to buy," said Harvey; "because Mr. Easterbrook and Mr. Pitts wouldn't take Mr. Todd's patterns and moulds at a gift. The only thing that's any use to us at Todd's was the secret, and if I got that single-handed, there's no call to pay for it."

"Father won't feel quite like that, you may be sure. He's anxious to see you first thing to-morrow."

She broke off and looked a little anxious.

"You'll be very careful, won't you? You know father so well now. Don't be vague over it. He's a right to hear everything about your discovery —don't you think so?"

"Certainly he has. I shall tell him exactly how it was, and how I got it. It just came at a time when I wasn't thinking about it. I'll tell you exactly how it was this minute."

"No; I don't want to know—at least, not till father has," she assured him.

Then they parted, and Porter slept not for thinking of the great meeting to come. He was not concerned or anxious, for he intended to tell what he believed to be the truth. In the light of that, his own line of conduct appeared to him quite unexceptional and worthy of all applause. But he did not seek applause: his hunger was for his master's satisfaction. He wanted to hear George Easterbrook confess that this discovery must advance the welfare of Brunel's Tower, and increase the master's own importance and power. He felt

that he had really done a very big thing for the works, and it was his chief joy to believe that Easterbrook (always generous and just) would correctly estimate what he had done, and esteem him accordingly. For it was to be valued by this man rather than be rewarded by him that the youth desired. His reward would centre in Easterbrook's recognition.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PEDESTAL DESTROYED

ON the night before his meeting with Harvey, George Easterbrook was at least as agitated as the young man himself. He wearied Paul Pitts, and evinced an unbounded enthusiasm. How to reward Porter adequately was the question, and how to alter the constitution of Brunel's Tower, that Harvey might henceforth possess some modest interest in the concern. These things did the master desire, and when Paul, amazed at the other's excitement, urged him to moderate his ideas and consider a while, he declared his partner lacking in imagination.

"You don't understand the boy like I do," he said. "But mark me, there's no limits to what he may do. I'm not setting any great store by this particular discovery, and I'm not even saying I shall push it—at any rate, until Wilberforce Todd drops. Then we should probably have swallowed up his little place in any case. But I'm saying this thing shows that young Porter's right out of the common. He's come to the discovery single-handed; he's done out of his own head what I couldn't do and you couldn't do. He's found the missing link—either with luck, or by simple brain-power. And one has got to take full account and

give full credit, Paul. It's a matter of justice, not sentiment."

"Of course, that's all right," answered Mr. Pitts. "No man loses his credit here—when credit is due. But, for the minute, I shouldn't trouble about that side. Find out all he's got to tell you first, and how he's come by the discovery. To my mind everything depends on that. Don't think I'd say a word against Harvey—I like him well, and he amuses me with his way of looking at things—though he often wants a caution, for his angle of sight is rather that of the hawk and jackdaw. No, I'm not saying a word against him, but I am saying that, with his ideas, he might easily think he was justified on a line of action which wouldn't please you or me. So wait and hear how he came by his secret. Don't get too excited about it, for you may be disappointed. There's one or two things you've got to remember, and the first is that it's not less than a miracle if he stumbled upon this on his own. Think of the experiments that we've made and the time we've put into it."

"These things happen so. Chance is the great discoverer."

"Granted; but there are other points of view. He's very friendly with Todd's people, and especially so with Nelly and her grandfather. Then, again, his sense of right and wrong is different from ours, and—"

"Stop!" cried Mr. Easterbrook. "You don't mean to hurt me, Paul, but you're going too far. The man or boy who has been along with us for two years or more has got our sense of right and wrong, and no other—else what's the good of us

in the world? We were born to command and to lead; and what we've done and what we've seen happen in the case of grown men—isn't it going to follow in the case of a boy? Granted that he's stronger and cleverer and more far-seeing than any we've had under our charge—grant that—but is our influence to count for nothing? Can those who work in an atmosphere of honesty and straightness and justice be dishonest and crooked and unjust? We've no right even to think such things possible—you less than me even, for you're a Christian."

"I'm thinking for you, not him," answered the other. "All that you say is true, and if you, who understand character so well, feel no fear, then there's no call for me to do so; but with this boy, you must always remember that he's got round your heartstrings, unconsciously, by some accident of his nature, and so you can't see him as clear as I can. I take your word about people most times, but in this case I hint that you mustn't be overmuch pained or shocked if you find Porter's got hold of this thing in a way that don't commend itself to you."

Easterbrook grew hot.

"I'm sorry you can say so or think it possible. I don't quite see that these views are called for. A man's honest or dishonest. There's no playing with a question of fact like that. You're inclined to suspect that he's got this great thing by means that aren't straight, and I'd stake my right hand that he hasn't. 'Tisn't my regard for the boy has made me misread his character; 'tis my knowledge of character has woke the regard. I read him

first, and took to him with all my heart afterwards. I wish you could see with my eyes, as you say you do. And now, late though it is, I'm going to have an hour with Wilberforce, and tell him what we've done."

Mr. Pitts judged privately that if anything improper had happened in the matter of the Todd secret, the old man himself would be the last to know it; but he was mistaken here, as his partner found out that night.

Easterbrook arrived at Watcombe, where Mr. Todd dwelt, and Wilberforce greeted him cheerfully.

"I've taken my nightcap, and Nelly's in bed; but it's never too late to have a tell with you, George, and we haven't met for a month of Sundays. Come and drink and light up. I'm glad to see you."

"I know it; but I bring doubtful news for you."

The old man nodded.

"Perhaps I can tell you what you're going to tell me, neighbour. I've been expecting to hear something from you, since my girl opened her heart to me a few months agone."

"Your Nelly? No, this don't concern her, Wilberforce."

The old man poured spirits for his visitor.

"List to me," he said; "then I'll list to you. Your fine young hopeful, Harvey Porter, is at the bottom of this—eh?"

"That's right."

"Is it? You heed what I'm going to say, George, and then if you think 'tis right, I'll be content. But I'm fearing the trouble is for you-

not me. I know you, you see, so terrible well. You remember the boy came up to Erme Clay-Pit with me and my granddaughter?"

"I heard about it from Luther Crispin the next time I was over there myself. By the same token the clay-works on Harford Moor are going to astonish us."

"I hope so; but 'tis early days, to be sure. Well, your Harvey, so to call him, got very friendly with my Nelly that day. He confided a long story to her, and told her that his one hope and thought in life was to learn to be a turner, and then leave you and come to me."

"Never, Wilberforce!"

"True as I'm eighty-four, George. Nelly couldn't lie, if you paid her her weight in diamonds to do so. He told her that he wanted to come to us, and she, poor little fool, took a mighty fancy to him. Seeing that, he made the running hot and strong, touched her hand, looked love at her, and all but asked her to marry him there and then. He made his meaning so clear, and played the lover so clever, so she says, that not even a love-sick girl could be blamed for trusting him. So there it was: he was to leave Brunel's Tower and come to me, when he'd learned his business with you; and then, of course, he'd marry Nelly some day and succeed to Todd's. 'Twas all cut and dried in his quick mind. And who shall blame him, so far? I don't. What young youth, with the same chance and a girl waiting to jump down his throat, wouldn't have done the like? So far, 'tis only human nature and no great harm

done; but now the case is altered, and you'll find a pretty big pinch of the devil coming into it."

Mr. Todd lit the pipe he had been loading, while Easterbrook stared and waited in silence for him to complete his story.

"There it was; and my poor fool of a maid—you know what they are—she was smote all of a heap to win a good-looking boy in this fashion. He had her at his mercy, of course, and the next thing was that she must repay his confidence with hers. She'd only got one secret in the world—only one. We were on Erme, remember, and I was going about my affairs under the eyes of the young people, knowing that they could mean nothing to Porter or any other man who lacked the clue. Not Fincher, nor yet Crispin, know why I buy a certain product of their clay-pit; but Nelly knew, and in a fit of woman's excitement she tells him. He learned from her why I was there, what I was after, and how I should use it. So much for that. And now you've come to tell me that Brunel's Tower has made a piece as big as we turn out at Todd's. Ain't that it?"

"Go on—finish."

"You're hit, George—you're hit! I'm properly sorry for that. But I'm fearing you've got to cut a loss, as poor old Sophia used to say, when she stopped work. The end is told in a very few words. From the moment that Porter knew our secret, he began to cool off to Nelly—little by little. She couldn't believe it at first, and kept it from me; but presently she saw it was all up, and that her dream of a lifetime of happiness with that handsome chap for a husband was over. No

doubt she did just the one thing he hoped and meant that she should do, sooner or later; and he must have thanked his lucky stars he got it so easy. After that day on Erme, we heard no more about Master Harvey wanting to come to Todd's. Instead, we saw him less and less until, blind and old as I am, I couldn't fail to mark the trouble with Nelly. She's homely at best, the dear, and not much to look at; but she's good and gentle and a very kind granddaughter to me. So I was a lot put about to see her sorrows come out on her white cheeks. At last she could hold it no more and told me everything. To the end she only thought shame of herself, and none of him seemingly. But I'm old, and know what men are. I reckoned that his cooling off from us was the bad sign, and explained it in one way only. But she explained it in another. She still held him honest as light, and judged that he'd only dropped away because he'd got tired of her and couldn't, in honour, go on pretending he cared for her any more; while I feared that he'd only dropped away so as to put a bit of time between finding out our secret and using our secret. And then, George, I heard he'd been to Harford again—along with your girl, this time; and that he'd fetched home a sack of—'clay,' Crispin said. But somehow I knew in my old bones that there was more than clay in that sack; and I only waited for the next thing. And now it's come. I'm cruel sorry for you, because I know what store you set on him. But there it is. You've got this satisfaction—though, come to think of it, it can be none to the likes of you—he was loyal, in his crooked, treach-

erous way, to Brunel's Tower; he never swerved from you; he plotted and did this rogue's trick only for you. He never meant anything when he got coaxing and carneying Nelly, or when he talked of coming to Todd's if I'd have him. 'Twas all in the game. No doubt he won it far easier and quicker than he guessed he would. But when he won, he dropped all that nonsense double-quick. With the result that my poor, silly girl had hell. There, George—and now what have you got to say? Drink up—'tis very proper to take a drop against a shock like this."

But Easterbrook did not drink. Instead, he forgot his glass and rose to depart.

"I've got nothing to say," he answered. "You've fairly knocked me out, Wilberforce. Pride goes before a fall. But I never reckoned on such a fall as this. If any man had told me—there, I can't talk."

"You needn't take it to yourself, George. No harm's done. You'll know what to say to Harvey Porter. Remember that he's young and clever. There's always such a lot more temptations in the world for clever people than the others. We fools must be gentle with the clever people, because it takes a very high-minded man to be honest and dead straight in a world of fools, when he don't happen to be one himself."

Easterbrook extended his hand.

"Good-night. Have no fear that right won't be done, Wilberforce."

"Not a spark, George. Where you go, there right follows. So he made a big piece, did he, the sly rascal! I'll come and see it, if you please."

"Save your trouble, Todd."

"Let him down light—see that your justice rises to letting him down light, George."

"Justice is justice. There's another side to this beyond your power to guess at."

"I do guess at it, boy," answered the old man, still holding Easterbrook's hand; "and that's why I say, be just and don't let your own feelings get out of hand. 'Boy,' I call you, for you're young to me. Hold in over this. Do unto others—"

"Good-night—and thank you. You're wise, but you don't feel the wound, Todd."

Thus, before his meeting with Harvey Porter, Easterbrook was warned from two sources to be just; but the sort of subtlety that had entangled him was, of all sorts, the most likely to unsettle his judgment. He was very angry, and passion made that night an eternity. He did not breakfast with Joanna and Mr. Pitts, but went to the works before seven o'clock. Thus he avoided contact with all men until the hour of meeting Harvey had struck. At eight the youth knocked at Easterbrook's private office door, was admitted, and found the master alone behind his desk. In the middle of the room stood the pedestal.

Porter, too, had passed a night of little sleep. This meeting was fraught with tremendous significance for him. It had come naturally to be the supreme event of his life. Life indeed reached this great goal and stopped. He had not reflected on what would follow, or weighed the good to accrue to himself. To hear George Easterbrook praise him and thank him for what he had done to advance the prosperity of Brunel's Tower—

that was the mighty experience he anticipated, and any sequel seemed small beside it.

He entered with a heart that beat very fiercely. He was ready to smile and eager to explain how he had done this thing for the honour and glory of Brunel's Tower. The end crowned the means in his judgment and he believed that when Easterbrook asked for particulars, he would be of the same opinion. But Porter hoped that the master would not trouble for an explanation until another occasion. From his standpoint the dramatic force of the approaching scene would be spoiled with detail. He pictured it, and had pictured it a thousand times, as simple and grand and majestic. Particulars might fitly follow on a later occasion, and his wide divergence from conventional morality led him to regard the particulars as really insignificant. He was undeceived.

Easterbrook began furiously, for his own life-long rules of conduct broke down under this extraordinary strain—a sort of test to which they had never before been subjected. In measure of the secret love he bore for Porter—a measure he had never guessed—so waxed his scorn and indignation now. He was not just, because he did not practise self-control; he was not fair, because only the facts animated him, not the character and heredity behind the facts. He made no allowance whatever for the sinner, and considered not that the sin could be anything but vile. That an evil and dishonest act might be performed for a worthy and pure motive; that characters exist who hold the means of no significance before the splendour of a distinguished end, he guessed not;

and he would have shown no mercy to such had their attitude been explained to him. Out of his own disillusion and bitterness he judged; and judgment was poisoned with wrath. The more angry he grew against Porter, the more angered he became with himself. It was largely his own self-contempt that he poured out in a storm upon the other; yet in the height of his passion he marvelled that he could feel passion, exhibit it thus, and suffer himself to be over-mastered by it.

He went first to that aspect of the matter the younger man hoped he would leave to the last; and viewed from that standpoint in Easterbrook's eyes, all other features of the great pedestal's creation were less than nothing.

"What did you think of me?" he thundered, without preliminary. "What mean, cowardly trash did you think I was to take your thievings? That's worst of all—the view you had of me. To work here under me for two years and more, and judge you were working for a rascal who'd praise you for lying to a weak-minded girl and stealing her secrets! A poor fool who believed your lies—an innocent, trustful, helpless thing, and an old man. And you're proud of it, you dog—you snake, that I took from the gutter only to sting me!"

The other had fallen back in utmost confusion. Unconsciously he put out his hand to steady his legs, and it rested on the pedestal, linking him to it.

"But, sir—sir!" he cried.

"Never again—your voice—nor yet the sight of you! That's what I'll remember—you standing

there—a thief and a rogue by what you filched! Get gone! Out of my sight, you graceless, worthless devil. And never come through gate of mine no more. Be outside the works in five minutes from now, or the men shall drive you out."

"I beg to God you'll hear me, master."

"Never—never no more. Evil's your only master—lies are your only master—and falsehood and thieving. Go, or I'll hit you down where you stand."

There were three stone steps that led up to the office, and the fallen favourite turned and descended them. He groped at the wall beside them, for horror had dimmed his eyes. He shook as he went down, and nearly fell. He had barely reached the bottom when there followed from the door above the great pedestal. Easterbrook had sent it after him, and it crashed upon the steps and covered them with a litter of splintered crocks.

Harvey Porter went straight to the main entrance of the works, passed through the avenue of pines, and departed forever.

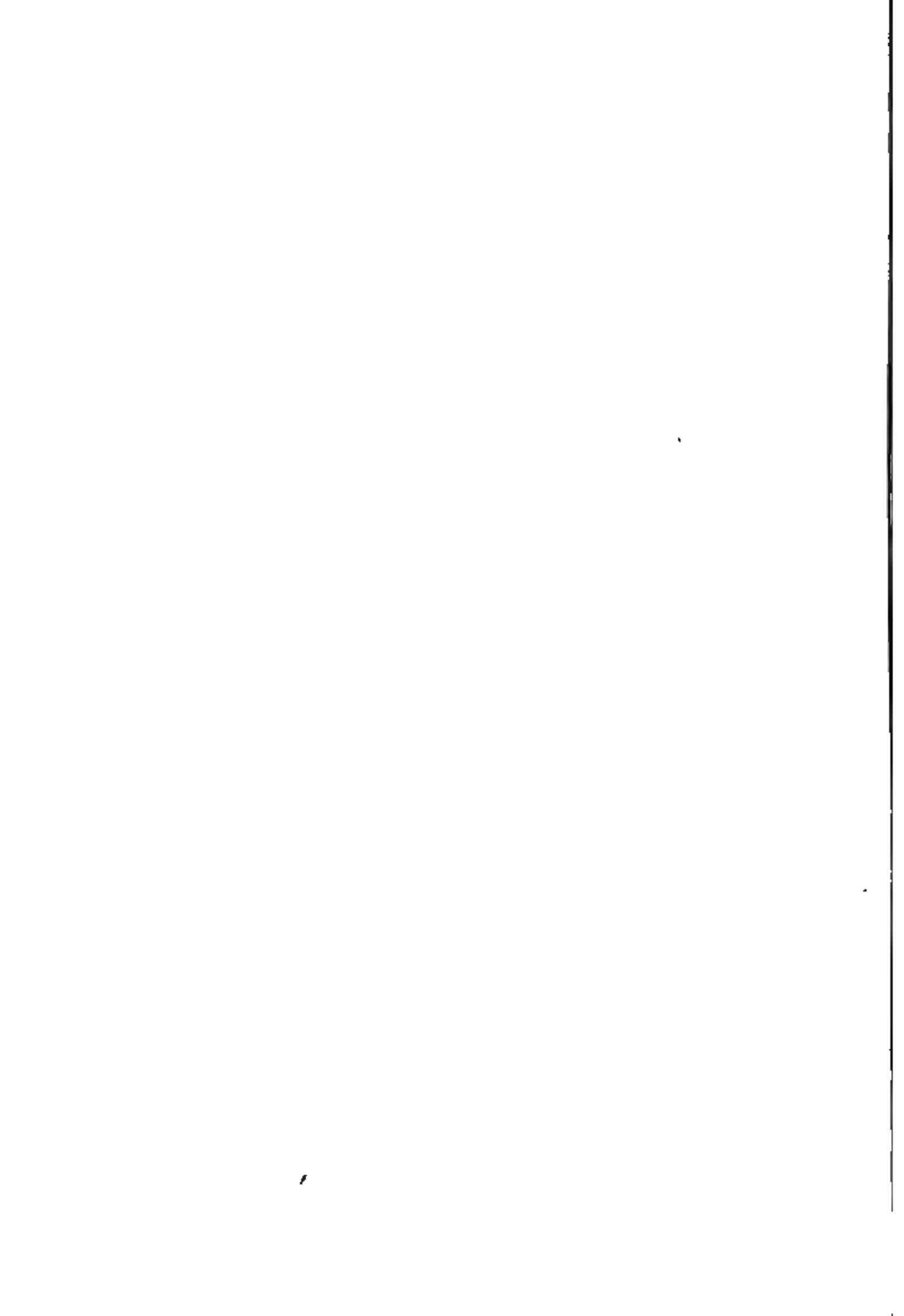
A few moments he stood outside the gate, stunned and half insensible. His mind refused to work. But at last something seemed to break in his head and the colour returned to his cheek. It came in a wave; then followed a darker wave, and he appeared as none had ever seen him until that moment. He trembled again, but with rage, and his dark eyes blazed. He showed his teeth and shook his fist at Brunel's Tower, where steam fluttered about its shapely shaft and above rose dark volumes of smoke.

"By God! Look out for yourself!" he shouted aloud.

"By God! Look out for yourself!" he screamed.

Then he grew calmer, went away, and returned to his lodging.

BOOK III



CHAPTER I

THE DINNER-HOUR

THE bell rang and the customary exodus from Brunel's Tower followed it. A dozen bicycles flashed away, and as many men and boys departed on foot; but the usual company met beside the kilns; the usual cans stood simmering above a lighted furnace.

Talk concerned one subject alone, and Tolley, as being the man most likely to know the facts, was bombarded with questions. But he could throw little light on the matter of Porter's departure.

"All I know is that he's gone, mates; and more nobody knows but the boss. He went home to my place before nine o'clock yesterday morning. The missis didn't see him; but he took his clothes, and his purse and a few things that he kept in a locked drawer. Because the drawer was open and empty and the key left in the lock, and a few shillings he owed were also left. And that's all I know about him, except that he was sacked and that Mr. Easterbrook flung the big pedestal he and Miss Easterbrook made down the office steps after him."

Timothy Coysh spoke.

"That's right enough, for I was passing and saw the smash, and when Easterbrook marked me, he told me to clear up the mess; which I did do.

A thousand pieces it fell in, and he flung it down—Easterbrook did—in anger. There was a proper clash between him and Porter, and the pedestal's at the bottom of it, in my opinion."

"Tried to drive too hard a bargain for his great discovery, I reckon," said Mr. Punchard. "Wanted more than the master would give, no doubt. Yet I wouldn't say that Porter was the grasping sort, eh, William?"

"Far from it," declared Godbeer. "He was all for the honour and glory of Brunel's Tower, and wanted a hand in it himself. He thought the world of the master. He was more for fame for Easterbrook than money for himself."

"You're all wrong," declared Marsland. "I was the first one to smell a rat in that quarter, and a bit cleverer than Easterbrook or Pitts either for once, though Easterbrook does reckon he's never mistaken. But I said to Christopher Ede six weeks ago—and Zachary there heard me, too—that Porter was not straight. And they've found out he isn't; and that's why he's hoofed out and his fine piece broken to shivers. He's clever, but only in a low and cunning sort of way. I figured him up months ago. He'd got no feeling of honour, or anything in that style. He'll go to the devil now."

"Not he," declared Godbeer. "He's not the sort to go to the devil; and for you to run him down behind his back is pretty paltry, Marsland, seeing but yesterday, when he was up, you were boasting of being his first friend in the works!"

Rupert grew hot.

"I don't want no arguments with you, God-

beer," he said. "But it's pretty good when you attack me, and you only a—well! What I know, I know; and I'm educated a long way above you, and you know it."

"You vain fool," answered the turner. "'Tis because you know so little that you declare so much. The less men know, the more positive they are about it. You air your opinions in season and out; but what do you know? That chap, whatever he's done, was worth fifty of you. And I tell you so."

"He may be, or he may not be," answered Rupert, assuming his haughty manner. "We won't bandy words, I'm sure, for it don't become me, whatever you may think about it. And as to opinions, if Harvey Porter wasn't bursting with 'em, who is? He'd got opinions on every subject, and you couldn't shake 'em, try as you would; and if some of you heard his opinion of you, I don't fancy you'd stand up for him quite so keen."

"Easy to talk about the absent. I shouldn't ope your mouth too wide, Rupert, for he may come back," said Christopher Ede. "'Tis only an idea that he's got chucked. He's the sort to take a lot of chucking."

"He's gone, you may be sure of that," replied Samuel Punchard. "We shall never see him here no more. He's took his hook and, knowing the master, we may be pretty sure he's done something pretty bad. Easterbrook never dismisses without a caution, unless the trouble's too serious. I can speak, because I helped the young man and fired the big piece. I asked him about it at the

time, and he said that he'd found some Dartmoor that was going to turn Brunel upside down in a year. He gave no par but he very well knew the force of wha done, and he very well knew the value of wouldn't tell me anything about it, howev

"We shall hear it had nothing to do wit—if we hear about it at all," prophesied Godbeer. "I don't say that he wasn't as to better himself as any other chap, and against him if he was; but it was for Eas that he did it, and Miss Easterbrook tol when the secret got out."

A man spoke to Thomas Body, who ate rest. One might never be sure whether a mad reply would come from him; but I asked him a question.

"You're along with Mr. Pitts, Tom, doubt nothing's hid from him. What's I say about this rumpus?"

"The rumpus was of Porter's maki swered Body. "I know the truth, bein secrets of the clay. The pots talk in fro openly, for they can tell I'm to be trusted the big thing, I always had my doubts And I say it was witchcraft, and we i suffer a witch to live. If Easterbrook ha ken the pedestal and drove Porter out, have done it myself with these hands."

They turned from him, and it was Teddy Palk, an under-fireman, to advance theory.

"List to me," he said. "You might thi the last to know about it; but by accident

first. And from James Masters at Todd's I've got it. And he had it from old man Todd's own granddaughter. Masters was very friendly with Miss Todd a bit ago; but she dropped him, so he told me, when our young blade came along—Porter, I mean. Then Porter and her got as thick as thieves, and Masters thought 'twas a case and that Harvey was going after her for her money."

"Judging others by himself, no doubt," commented Godbeer.

"I don't know as to that, William; but whatever Porter may have proposed to her, nothing came of it, and he cooled off again. But now we see that he'd got what he wanted out of her, and that was Todd's secret. And that's how he came to make the pedestal."

"Just what I'd have worked out against him, if I'd had time," declared Marsland. "Just a thing inside his nature. And you may bet your life that Easterbrook had found it out and was ready for him and his lies yesterday morning. I'd have given a week's screw to see what happened between them!"

"Very easy to guess," answered Mr. Coysh. "We, who know Easterbrook, can hear him talking. Of course he wouldn't have no use for secrets choused out of a poor, ugly girl by promises of marriage or other lies."

"'Tis a quality of Porter's mind," explained Mr. Godbeer, "that he never could look at a lie same as we do. We must allow for that and try and see other people's point of view, before we condemn them from our own. That's what Christians ought to do, anyway."

"I don't think so," answered Jeremiah Tolley. "A real Christian's point of view is cast iron, and we know perfectly well what it will be every time. Therefore, when wrong is done, we needn't begin making excuses for the wrong-doer and trying to let him down light. I knew Porter better than anybody here, and I wouldn't say but what I liked him better. In fact, I thought a terrible lot of him, and so did my wife. He was a head and shoulders over us in his natural gifts, and me and my wife aren't under no delusions about what we know and what we don't. Porter was a wonder. He could read anything and give out what he read afterwards in spoken language, which be much easier to understand than book language. But with all his natural cleverness, so much the more was expected from him, and so much the blacker are his sins. I don't say it because he's gone, and I've lost a lodger; I say it because I'm a Christian man."

They continued to discuss the situation, and most were indifferent; a few were glad; and a few were sorry.

None, however, attempted to condone the offence, as Teddy Palk described it. All agreed that a base and mean thing had been done, and that Porter was justly punished. They held that the incident redounded mightily to George Easterbrook's credit, and Punchard praised him.

"Gall and wormwood to him to find that he's made such a mistake, all the same," said Adam Zachary, who had not contributed to the discussion until now. "He'll never forget his failure, for it's about the first he's ever had; and to have

failed with the character of a chap not twenty years old! He'll sulk about it, and we shall feel it."

"He's a lot too large-minded to do that," answered Coysh. "We all make mistakes, and nothing is easier to go wrong about than the characters of a growing creature—boy or girl, or dog or horse. They're as unformed in their minds as they are in their bones; and you'll often see threatening troubles pass away from young things, as Nature brings them to fulness of body and mind."

"Right, Timothy—a very true word," declared William Godbeer, "and the large-minded way to look at this is to say that Porter's come a terrible cropper and wants to be helped on his feet again. We put spectacles on many a child's nose, don't we? And presently his sight is steadied and he needs them no more. I hope Porter will be helped now, for now is the time to help him."

"In a way, it's the master's fault, for he spoiled Porter," asserted Zachary. "He was death on him from the minute he invented the Hathaway Cottage; and nothing he could do was wrong after that."

"That's not it," argued Godbeer. "Nothing he did do was wrong till this happened. We must be fair. He didn't do anything to upset Easterbrook's mind until now, else he'd very soon have heard about it. And now he's made his first slip."

"You're a lot too easy, William," declared Mr. Punchard. "You'd say that murder was simply an accident, if you call such a deed as this a slip. Anyway, 'tis a slip that might have got most of

us into quod; and far from being treated too bad, I judge that he's been treated too easy."

"I wonder what he's up to?" mused Christopher Ede, who had a speculative mind. "I'd much like to know how his thoughts ran when he found himself caught out, and what he'll do next."

"He won't take it lying down," declared Mr. Tolley. "He's got his own views of justice, though they ain't ours, and I've heard him wonderful indignant sometimes for other people. So be sure he'll get terribly angry for himself."

"The thing is to know who he'll try and get back on," declared Adam Zachary; "for I agree with Jeremiah; he'll try and get back on somebody. It might be that chap at Todd's for giving him away—if he did give him away—or it might be Miss Todd who did so. I shouldn't think he would want to score off a girl, all the same."

"He'll aim higher than that: he'll go for Easterbrook and Pitts!" foretold Rupert Marsland. "He's always got big ideas, and he'll reckon that he owes them all he can pay, and a bit over, for what Easterbrook gave him yesterday."

"He's not a revengeful sort, however," replied Teddy Palk.

"You can't tell that. You never knew what was going on in his head. He hid it," answered Marsland.

Upon this aspect of the case they argued long, and were about equally divided. Some held that the name of Porter would be no more heard, and that he was not the sort to waste his time attempting to strike back against one so strong as Easterbrook; while others believed that he certainly

would do so, even though he might have to wait for many a day to reach his revenge.

Then, from considering what Porter thought of his downfall, they began to wonder how George Easterbrook regarded it. Some regretted his experience, and were sorry for him; others did no such thing, but held that he was rightly served for trusting such an unknown quantity as Porter.

"He's backed his own judgment once too often," said Zachary, "and it's that thought will rub it into him and punish him. He'll be troubled for himself, not Porter. When a wasp stings us, we think about our pain, not the creature's death."

"He hasn't stung—not yet," said Godbeer. "What he did was meant for honey, not stinging. The point of view has made it bitter, I grant, and that's because his honey came from the poisonous flowers. But he hasn't stung; and, if I know him, he won't."

"He won't succeed, whatever he tries," replied Zachary, "because he's not strong enough; but he will try, just as a rat tries to gnaw the stick that smashes it."

"He won't try; I'll go bail he'll do no such thing," answered William Godbeer; but most of those present believed that he might.

"He'll have the will, but not the power," said Marsland; but Mr. Tolley took a graver view.

"If he's got the will, he'll very soon find the way," he answered. "You don't know him like my wife and me know him. He's strong and that ingenious that he'll see a way out of a puzzle you'd never guess or think was there. And when it's a case of getting back on any man that scored,

off him, his mind is just of a pattern to do it crushing, and do it quick."

They laughed at this, however, and when they asked Mr. Tolley what he thought that the discharged lad could do, he admitted that he had no idea.

" 'Tis his mind is working on the subject, not mine," he answered. "We shall know what he can do after he's done it, and not before."

CHAPTER II

BY NIGHT WITH SAMUEL PUNCHARD

Now the summer weather of Harvey Porter's environment had bred a thunderstorm, and outraged, dazed, indignant, he suffered the buffet of it. For some time any other view of the situation than his own was obscured from him; he regarded himself as a sufferer under monstrous injustice, and his gratitude was turned to gall. But presently reason wrestled with him and strove to thrust between him and the revenge that he had planned.

For a week he vanished, and no man saw him; then came a night when he had designed to punish George Easterbrook, and practise a plan he had matured. He proceeded in a sort of mechanical way to carry out his purpose; but the salt of it had lost all savour when the time came. Though he knew it not, his environment of late years, and the steady, ceaseless trend of example and precept that it represented, had left a mark, and joined forces with heredity in a struggle for his character. He was no longer the lad who stretched a rope for Jack Ede.

Yet he proceeded upon the evil inspiration begotten of his downfall, and the act of retaliation, once planned, appeared to carry him along with

it. But the interest waned as passion waned, and a mental anti-climax had set in before the deed was to be done. To the last it stood doubtful whether the incentive of his disaster would carry him through to strike the blow, or other forces would combine to slake the lust for vengeance, now a week old.

Samuel Punchard, sitting after midnight alone with his furnaces, was startled suddenly by the sound of feet overhead. Then a man appeared at the top of the staircase that led to the storerooms, and Harvey Porter descended.

"It's all right, Samuel," he said. "The night is wet, so I slipped in here a good few hours ago, when the works were empty and you had gone out of the way for a minute. I've had a sleep in Mr. Pitts's room. How's yourself?"

"You oughtn't to be here, and very well you know it," answered the fireman. "You was ordered off once and for all; and you're trespassing."

"And why—why was I ordered off?"

"I don't know, and I don't want to know. We've got our own ideas; but nobody knows exactly."

"I'll tell you, then. 'Twas only for showing my gratitude he sent me off—Easterbrook, I mean."

"Stuff!" answered Mr. Punchard. "Gratitude ain't so common that he would have resented that. And you'd better go out of here. I don't want to talk to you. 'Twas ingratitude, more like, and some secret wickedness, no doubt, that made him sack you. And this I know—for his great friendship and kindness toward you was never hid—

this I know, that you must have done something outrageous bad for him to do what he did."

Porter made no attempt to go, but sat down on a barrel that stood close by the furnaces.

"You've got to listen to me now. Then you can tell a few of the others. You've all seen this with the master's eyes, of course, not with mine. The ingratitude is his, not mine, and if there's anything viler than throwing the gifts of your inferiors back in their faces, I'd like to know what it is. If you'd done Easterbrook a good turn—a proper grand turn, Samuel—and he'd treated you like he treated me, and scorned your gift, and flung you out, wouldn't all you felt for the man be turned to poison, and wouldn't you swear to God never to rest in your bed again till you'd bitterly paid him back in his own coin?"

"You needn't ask me no silly riddles," replied the fireman. "We all know Easterbrook, and we know that he's a grateful man and a just. And when he put you out, and your pedestal after you, so that it was scat to pieces, we knew that he was right, as he always is, and that he'd found you out in some bit of wickedness far too bad to be pardoned."

The other listened, and for a time spoke not, while Samuel threw open a furnace door and stoked. The rosy light illuminated Porter brilliantly, where he sat in the radius of it. There was no sound but the thunder of the flues and the roar of the flames pent up within.

"That's the interest on doing good, no doubt," answered Porter, when the furnace door was shut again. "Do it long enough, and none will believe

you can do anything else. And then, do what you will, the people will back you and believe in you, like you do in Easterbrook. I'll tell you what I did, and you're a fair man and can judge. I've been terrible anxious to reward George Easterbrook for his kindness to me. I was out to pay back all he'd done for me; and I did; and he scorned it and threw my payment back in my face. For why? Because he didn't like the manner of it. That was my affair, and not his; and the way I found it out, the way to make big pots, was my affair, too, and not his. I got it through others, of course, who told me of their own free-will; then they ran snivelling to him to tell him I was everything bad. And he believed them and wouldn't hear me. Roared me down and sent me away without a chance to explain or make good. And he's the just man and the wise man, who never makes a mistake, and always sides with them in the right."

"You were in the wrong, and he knew it," answered Mr. Punchard. "And if you was to talk from now till the Trump of Doom, you'd never make me think different. He knows better than we do."

"You say that because he's moulded you and the rest, like he moulds the pots—in his own pattern. That's what the strong do for the weak. And I'd have been moulded, too, if I'd stopped along with him; and I'd have been very well content to be, for he seemed that fine and generous and sensible that it was my great wish to be like him. But this has thrown a bit of light on him for me; and a bit of light on me myself, for that

matter. You've got to be yourself in this world, and it's no good trying to be like somebody else."

"No doubt; but you can prune a tree and you can prune a boy. He's pruned lots afore your time, and he'd have pruned you if you'd given him the chance. But I reckon he'd tasted your fruit and found you wasn't worth pruning no more."

"My best was for him—my best. I only thought of him and how to repay him."

"Your best was mighty bad, then. He's not a man to belittle the best. And, least of all, your best. 'Twas common knowledge in the works how high he set you. I'd as soon have thought to see Godbeer, or Zachary, dismissed as you."

"I'm glad now I've gone, all the same," declared Porter. "I only looked at Brunel's from inside till now. But I've looked at it from outside since, and I see George Easterbrook isn't all I thought him. He's narrow and short-sighted and soft. Not soft to me, but soft to the world. He's strong himself, but he don't want anybody else to be strong. He likes to reign over us; but if we show a bit of spirit and dash, and try to reign over anybody else, he's very soon down on us. You've got to be in his pattern, and see right and wrong just as he sees it, or you ain't no use to him. And when he found I was stronger than him, because I took a larger view about right and wrong—"

"You fool!" said Punchard. "You hopeless, young fool! Don't you see that his experience has

taught him that right and wrong are more than words, and that the whole world depends for its hope on mankind doing right?"'

"And is his right the only right? Is there no other sort of right than his? If I did what I thought was right and fair, what right had he to treat me like a rascal? If I think all's fair in business, and find myself clever enough to—But there, I can't explain to you. You're one of Easterbrook's pots—thrown on his wheel; and though I was willing clay, and should have come to it, I'm glad now I didn't. 'Tis a long way better to model yourself on your own pattern than let another do it for you. He's stronger than me in some ways; but I'm stronger than him in others. Yes, I am; because I'm freer—only the free are strong. I can see that much. He's been lucky, or else he's hoodwinked himself. I say it's one or t'other, for he's full of opinions about right and wrong and all that, yet his opinions about wrong have never stood between him and worldly success. That's funny—ain't it? But perhaps, when that happened, he argued it out with himself and didn't allow private notions about good and evil to intrude into his business. But I don't pretend, and so I'm stronger than him."

"You've got a conscience, I suppose," said the fireman. "'I've known men born without a heart, but never without a conscience.'"

"I had a heart anyway—till he broke it," answered Porter. "'Yes, broke it, I tell you, and flung my gifts in my teeth, and made me mad. I don't know nothing about a conscience.'"

"'Tis your conscience that's making you fret

and fume now, my son. And conscience is strength, not weakness."

"If I thought I had a conscience, I'd tear it out! I see what conscience is, and what it does; and I've got no use for it. Conscience comes from outside, and not from inside. I hadn't got no conscience till I came here. And now the beginning of it is dead. That's all over now. If Easterbrook woke a conscience in me, he's killed it. He's weak, I tell you, and can only see with his own narrow sight. If he'd only listened to me, it might have all been different. But he wouldn't listen, and cast me out; and now I will do what he would call wrong, and laugh at him. I won't let none of his sticky opinions come between me and my life in the future."

"You're a bad case," answered Samuel, "and you've got your mind packed with evil, and I hope you'll take my advice, and try and learn by this lesson, and let down your sharp medicine in a proper spirit, and cast out the wickedness in you."

On Porter's nineteenth birthday Mr. Easterbrook had given him a silver watch. He consulted it now by the light of the furnace.

"I don't want no medicine, because I'm not ill," he said. "'Tis you creatures here are all ill, not me. You think I'm weaker than Easterbrook, or Pitts, or any of you. So I should be if I was on a chain. But I'm not. I'm free. I'm going to be myself; and myself says I've been used shameful, and ought to show it and hit back."

"Go away—I won't have you here no more. Be off!"

"I'm going. But I'll show you something first. I didn't come to warm my hands. Step out to the packing-shed half a minute. There's something going to happen there that will surprise you. Don't think hardly of me, Samuel, when I'm gone. You know I meant well, and was always grateful to you for all you taught me."

"That's right. I've never had nothing against you till now," admitted Mr. Punchard.

"I like you better than any of 'em, because you was the bravest," said the youth. "You're what I call a man, and I'm sorry to go from you—you and William Godbeer. The others are nothing."

Samuel was slightly moved.

"'Tis very unfortunate for you," he admitted.

"So it is, and a puzzle, too. Life's a very puzzling sort of thing, and it's just as dangerous to try and help people as to try and hinder 'em, so far as I can see. People ain't all like me, and glad to be helped. It may have been that he was too proud to take it from me. Come on—'tis nearly three o'clock, and I must set off. I'll show you what's in the packing-room."

Punchard, without suspicion of evil, got the key, where it hung on a bunch. The rain had ceased, and the night was clear and starry between showers.

"You wouldn't make trouble, I should hope," he said, "in the packing-room, or anywhere else."

"I haven't been in the packing-room. Let me carry the lantern. I only want to make good what I told you."

The unsuspecting fireman went forth, and soon reached the door of the packing-room, a low build-

ing that stood twenty yards distant from the works.

"What did you say?" he asked. "You said such a lot, and what wasn't foolish was wicked. I'm just as sorry as anybody that you've failed. I hoped great things for you."

"Go on hoping," answered Harvey. "I ain't done with yet. Only I want more room and larger ideas."

Mr. Punchard unlocked the door of the shed, and entered; but as he did so the door was sharply slammed behind him and locked again. The younger had stopped outside.

"That's what I wanted to show you in the packing-shed, Samuel. Just that I'm far stronger than Easterbrook, as I said. Stronger and freer. D'you know what I could do now?"

"Let me out, and be quick about it," said Mr. Punchard. "Don't you know my fires are alight and two hundred pounds' worth of stuff in the kilns?"

"What's that to me? There's worse damage may come to a pottery than losing a baking. Easterbrook's at my mercy now. You can't get out, and none would hear you if you bawled yourself hoarse. So what's going to stop me from burning the works down?"

"God Almighty's going to stop you," answered Mr. Punchard. "What you've learned at Brunel's Tower is going to stop you. Right and wrong may be words; but you know what they stand for now as well as anybody, Harvey Porter. And you've got a live conscience whether you like it or not; and you can no more cast forth your conscience

and live than you can cast forth your heart and live. So let me out and get rid of the devil that's at your elbow."

"If it's a devil, it's a just one. A man's good name can't be paid for by a bonfire. But it would help my pride. All wood inside the walls, and a child could set it alight in five minutes with red-hot coals from your furnaces, Samuel."

"True for you, Harvey. But there's other red-hot coals than mine, if the Bible counts."

"Mr. Pitts—all his fine moulds would be lost, and the medals and awards, and the books and everything. A far-reaching job it would be—eh, Samuel?"

"So far-reaching that you'd never reach the end, Harvey. You'd light a fire that would feed on your own flesh through eternity."

"I don't believe that rot, and more do you, for you've often told me so. 'Tisn't fear of hell-fire would hold my hand. 'Tisn't any sort of fear. Fear's a small thing. It's greatness that stops me, not smallness. Come out—it's time you took a trial, I reckon. I wouldn't have a dish of your penny toys go wrong for anything I could do. When I hit, I'll hit people my own size. You tell George Easterbrook that to-morrow, Samuel."

He unlocked the door, and Mr. Punchard emerged. He was trembling, and his face looked pale in the lantern-light.

"I'm not mad, nor yet wicked," said Porter. "I'm only strong. I'm made of fine stuff, Samuel—finer stuff than any at Brunel's Tower. And I'd never return evil for evil, though I swore to God to do it a week ago. I couldn't if I wanted

to. I did want to; but I couldn't. You tell Easterbrook to fear nothing from me. Tell him I'd do him a good turn to-morrow. Tell him I'm grateful to him for all the good he did me. Tell him I've forgiven him for casting me out. He did it because his mind is in too tight a pattern to understand the likes of me. I'll never say an unkind word, or think an unkind thought about him any more. 'Twas my wish and pride to serve the man faithful and true; and maybe I'll do it yet."

He went away, and night swallowed him up under the fir-trees; while Punchard mopped his face and turned over the message, that he might deliver it correctly.

" 'Tis the toss of a coin and the edge of a razor whether he'll be hung or have a public funeral some of these days," he said, when the second fireman, Teddy Palk, came to relieve him, three hours later, and hear the story of Porter's visit.

CHAPTER III

“ABOUT IT AND ABOUT”

HEREDITY had done its work with Porter, yet this was not the only force to affect his actions. Environment and the experience of the last few years streamed into his life also, and, mingling with the currents that flowed from within, acted as an incentive or deterrent. Another stimulus also influenced his attitude to life, and Paul Pitts it was who glimpsed the fact.

He and his partner had speech together, for on the morning that Punchard told of his nocturnal meeting with Harvey Porter, George Easterbrook took the story straight to Pitts, and heard him upon it.

“He surprises everyday minds, and always will,” said Paul. “He may surprise them unpleasantly or pleasantly; but he’ll always surprise ‘em, because there’s something in him they haven’t got. Whether that something is father or mother we can’t say. We can’t tell which parent gave him the nameless something that belonged to him. It may be neither. It may be just life that’s done it; or, again, it may be that thing we can only call the man himself—a thing apart from the ingredients, though the result of the mixing of the ingredients. Who can tell? Whatever he is, you’ve got to remember the driving force is

all exerted for one person at present, and that's you. You, and only you, are the object of his energies, mistaken though they may be. You must keep that in mind."

Easterbrook, who had been unlike himself of late, called Joanna from her painting-room, and told the tale again. Great depression had fallen upon him since the departure of Porter. For a time he would not hear the young man's name; then he began to discuss him, and explain his characteristics and obliquities of moral vision. He showed no mercy with his tongue, and trampled on Porter. Only Joanna withstood him, until sometimes he ordered her to be silent.

Now he was excited, and expressed a desire to send the police after Porter.

“Why?” asked Joanna.

“Because he's shown us what's in his mind. No doubt he mixed up lies and truth, for a mind like his can't see clearly enough to separate them. He's trying to soften me with his messages; he's trying to get in here again; and he hopes, no doubt, I'll yield and take him back. But when he finds I don't yield and will never look on his face again, then he'll throw over pretence, and let the devil have it all his own way, and seek to do me an injury.”

“Never, father! I'd stake my life on that,” declared Joanna. “Come what may, he wouldn't do it.”

“Joanna's right. There's hope; that's what I say,” added Paul. “And for this reason: character changes. It's absurd to say it doesn't, for I've seen it change. I don't believe there's a charac-

ter in the world that surroundings can't largely influence for good or evil. All depends on that. And Brunel's Tower was the right surrounding for Porter. It was working in him for good. It would have won him over presently, and put his seeing right, and led him clean away from the doubtful ideas he harboured. Doesn't this talk with Punchard prove it? There are qualities that go with his defects, and it's a very curious thing about human nature that you can't have some of the grandest qualities without the danger of certain defects to match them. Light and shade, that is; and I'd sooner have it than one of those flat characters, where a man's just stupidly, meanly good, because he's not got the greatness or pluck to be anything else. Porter only wants teaching, and if you'd tried to teach him, instead of thinking him perfect and above teaching, this might have been escaped, George."

"You're wrong a thousand times, Paul," replied the master hotly. "Human nature's not built that way, though I thought and said it was. This trouble makes me angry for a score of reasons, and not the least because it knocks on the head my own belief. It's bad to have your pet theory exploded before your face. What you tell me about environment I told you long ago, and steadfastly I clung to it. I reckoned I had proved it a thousand times, but this has shattered it to pieces. I give that up—I was mistook. All things that matter to character come from inside—I see that now before the downfall of this boy."

"You never heard him, father. You never let him speak."

“What could he say? Wilberforce Todd is honest as daylight, and ever tender and gentle with youth. There’s not a shadow of a doubt what happened, and he was guilty with the vilest sort of guiltiness.”

“Seeing that you’ve changed, then, and hold the harm comes from within, where it was placed through no fault of Harvey’s, you should forgive him,” argued Mr. Pitts. “The blood in a man’s veins flows there from no choice of his own; yet, though we’ll send a poor chap who’s a consumptive to hospital, we send another poor chap who’s a thief to gaol. Why should one go to gaol more than the other?”

“I grant it; I see it in him, and I feel it in myself also,” answered Easterbrook. “This has shot a lot of light into me—as trouble and disappointment and disillusion often will do. It’s the blood in our veins that makes life difficult for us, Paul; and often the brains in our head cannot fight it. The blood’s stronger than the brains as a rule. I see it—oh, how clear I see it! There’s many and many a man in the world at this moment looking hopelessly on and watching the blood in his veins drown him, and he without power to raise more than a cry of agony at his own destruction. ’Tis a cry our ears ought to be quick to hear—the cry of foundering souls.”

“You shan’t say such cruel things, and you shan’t think them,” said Joanna, putting her arms round her father’s neck.

“It’s contrary to nature,” he continued, his mind switching off to Porter. “Friendship—the young dog—to send me friendship! Does he think

I'm blind? Doesn't he know—— Friendship!
How can he dare?"

"Ignorance," said Paul Pitts.

"Insolence—insolence, or else cant."

"There was no cant in him, father."

"He's an enemy—a secret one. He'll strike presently."

"Don't feel like that to a misguided boy—a boy on your own showing led wrong by the blood in his veins."

"We've been too much to each other ever to be nothing," declared Easterbrook. "I was a second father to him, and a better one than his first, I reckon. I'm strong, and can go my way and forget him; but he's weak—too weak to forget me. And so he'll be an enemy, and when the pinch comes and the world's all against him, as it will be, he'll think back on me and hate me."

"The world won't be against him, father," said Joanna. "The world will take very kindly to him presently, for he's got a way with him to make the world like him."

"That's right," said Pitts. "You are not the world, George. You've got to disentangle the deed from the motive power behind it in this case. And since you've reached the point of not blaming Harvey, but the Power that mixed him and let that faulty streak remain in him, then, as a wide-seeing and just man, you should magnify the motive and keep the deed in its proper place. He did it for Brunel's Tower, and he'd have sacrificed fifty Todds for Brunel's Tower. And Brunel's Tower means you to him."

"Hope and fear are not moral motives," an-

swered the master. “There’s no credit in his gratitude, so to call it and so to grant it. He’s evil at the heart. No good thing could come out of him. I’ve forgiven him for the reasons I’ve told you, but I’ll not care about a bad thing more. I’ll cut him out and forget him. He’s impure, I tell you. It’s no mere stain; it’s a discolouration of the clay through and through.”

He showed unusual excitement, and that night, when the little party of three had finished supper and sat together in their parlour, Easterbrook began again. The incident had shaken him deeply, and he surprised his friend and his daughter by the way he endured it. For he was far from himself, and neither had seen him so unsettled and moody. He fought to justify his attitude, and revealed glimpses of his own nature and secret convictions that even Pitts had never plumbed until now.

He began to talk philosophy and religion, and brought it round to his present disappointment. He appeared to draw terrific conclusions from his personal tribulation, and exhibited a distorted sense of proportion that astounded Pitts, until the other explained. Paul was reading the Bible to himself, and Easterbrook spoke.

“How you can reconcile that with this—this everyday, scorching, tearing thing called ‘modern life’—beats me,” he observed. “People talk of making the Old Testament and the New pull in double harness; but to make the New Testament and To-day pull in double harness—who can do that? Can’t you see it?”

"God's still the same God, George. Nothing can happen without His will."

"Then why does such a terrible lot happen contrary to His will? Why do nations do evil, and sow the wind and reap the whirlwind? Why does your God punish weakness and reward strength, and leave goodness and evil out of the account, like Nature? Why does the wicked man flourish like a green bay-tree, and the righteous man beg his bread?"

"Man's intellect can ask more questions than God cares to answer, George, because God knows that even God's self can't put a quart into a pint pot. We shall never know his reasons, for the simple, all-sufficient reason that our brains are not big enough to hold His reasons. You couldn't explain to a year-old baby how you make a vase, and God couldn't explain to your wits or mine how He makes a universe. And as to ill happening, and the Almighty not appearing to be almighty enough to stop it, that's threshed out by my side long ago. Because God don't look to be all patience and mercy and love from our point of view, that's only to say our point of view don't reach to the infinite, and we can't tell, or see, what infinite patience and infinite goodness are. There's stars in the sky that look to be single to our eyes, but a telescope will show they are double; and if we come to such grief over our fellow-man's motives, and misread them so constant as we do, then surely it's little wonder we can't measure God's motives, Who knows the end from the beginning."

Easterbrook was interested, and forgot his own gloom of mind.

“No, no, that won’t do,” he said; “and I’ll tell you why, Paul. We know what goodness is well enough, just as we know what badness is. You’ll grant that your God has suffered us to learn what goodness is.”

“What then?”

“Why, then goodness will still be goodness, and badness will still be badness, however you raise it. Raise it up to infinity, if you like—to infinite goodness. Still goodness it must continue to be, and God’s goodness can’t be man’s badness. To torture nations with war and cut off the manhood of a whole generation; to slay millions of the innocent in an earthquake; to starve babies in a famine; to hang the wrong man on the gallows—that’s not goodness in God any more than it would be in man.”

“The Almighty’s above man’s right and wrong—same as He is above everything else,” answered Mr. Pitts.

“So be it; then let Him be. All-powerful we’ll grant such a God, but it’s mere shoe-licking and snobbery to say He’s all good. If He’s good, Paul, then our standards of good ought to be revised; and if the best man can do is to drop his own standards of goodness and set out to follow God’s standards, as exhibited in His works, then how is it we’ve got our own ideas which are so different from His, and where did they come from?”

“From Him,” answered the other. “From Him, that caused this Book to be written for our light and leading. Take it, or leave it; we that take it can but think the rule good enough if we

were only strong enough to follow it. These are God's laws—made for us; the laws that He's been pleased to make for Himself are not our business. He's above our good and evil."

"Then we come to a God that prescribes one rule of conduct for us and another for Himself," said Easterbrook.

"And doesn't every other father of children do the same? For my part, I misdoubt all this weakening of God. I've heard clergymen of late stand up and apologize for Him in the pulpit, as if He was a doubtful character—like they used to for the Devil."

"From man's point of view, He must ever be doubtful," declared Easterbrook; "but you argue now that your God's right in telling us to do what He says, and not what He does. We must take it that God's neither good nor evil, according to our values, just as Nature's neither wise nor foolish, according to our values. And we don't know anything about either, except that they both do things for which, according to our views of evil, we should hang our fellow-man."

Mr. Pitts laughed.

"Never did I hear you take sides so hotly," he answered, "or back up human values against the larger values that move like the comets do—in orbits we can't measure. You were always so impartial and fair, and so ready to grant that a lot happens we can't explain."

"I'm a humanist," declared Mr. Easterbrook, "and when my own seeing turns out wrong and I find I am blind, where I thought I had got a perfect vision, then naturally it makes me feel bitter.

If I've said anything that was outside fair argument, and expressed my difference of opinion in a way not respectful to your religion, Paul, I'm sorry for it. But I'm all for man, as you know; I preach man, and profess man, and believe that man is going to be the light of man, and his best teacher and guide. So a crusher like this leaves me disappointed about my own faith in man at large."

“Put your faith in something better, and leave man to his Maker, George.”

“Where should I have been if everybody had said that when I was young and struggling? I owe everything to man,” declared the other.

“Then what about Porter?”

“We don't let the snake bite twice—unless we're Christians. I can't turn the cheek to the smiter.”

“But did he smite? He didn't mean to smite. Don't criticize him as sharp as you're criticizing God. Porter's human, anyway, and if you take pains to read him in the light of man that you talk about, then you'll surely solve his riddle. We—Joanna and I—can do that. And how much the more ought you to be able?”

They talked in desultory fashion, and Joanna listened. From the texture of their conversation she gathered some definite points of interest respecting her father's attitude of mind. But though she played a peaceful part and did not intrude upon their discussion, it bore more fruit in her case than in that of the men. Neither influenced the other, but both influenced her. She built for herself a theory from their conversation,

and determined upon a definite action. She, too, had felt the affair of Harvey Porter very deeply; but it was complicated in her case with secret emotion. She was interested with an interest different in kind from her father's, and her interest might not have led to action, since tradition, training, and convention would have all put a brake upon action; but now she felt inspired to a definite step by her father's attitude; she rejoiced to believe herself justified in taking action. Inclination had already whispered and prompted; but she had refused to listen; now, however, she conceived that duty also dictated her inspiration, and assured herself that, while for her own secret interest she could not act, for her father's sake she might.

She welcomed the conclusion gladly and with a great hope.

CHAPTER IV

JOANNA AND NELLY

JOANNA's elation at her secret plan suffered eclipse within a week, for it was based on an assumption which proved mistaken. She had suspected that presently Harvey Porter would appear before her father, and invite him to reconsider his dismissal. The circumstances of the case and her knowledge of Harvey's character, and his enthusiastic desire to throw in his lot with Brunel's Tower, inclined her to this opinion; but time passed, and he made no sign. After the night on which he spoke to Samuel Punchard, there came not further news of him from any quarter. He was gone indeed, and upon his disappearance the young woman had opportunity to weigh the significance of his departure on her own life.

Presently she called at Watcombe, and Mr. Todd welcomed her.

"Nelly's out, but she'll be back to tea," he said; "and there's nobody that I'd wish to see more than you, unless it was your father. Since that young rogue was sent packing and his work destroyed, I've not met with Easterbrook. But I've heard of him and the way he treated the young man. I hope, coming so early in life, it will be a lesson to him and turn him from his doubtful outlook, if it isn't too deep in the grain. 'Twas all

a very painful story, and I shall never see exactly what was in his mind. But, for one thing, he must have misread your father's character to have thought he'd approve such a bit of sharp practice. It's the same with the bad people as the good in that respect, Joanna; they're prone to judge others by themselves, and each man's very ready to reckon he's a type and fair sample of mankind. A good man may do so, because, thanks to the power of God, there's more naturally good folk than naturally bad—along of the saving effects of the Christian christening; but a bad man mustn't think the staple of mankind are like him, else he'll be roughly surprised, same as Harvey Porter was."

"We haven't heard him yet," answered Joanna. "Don't think I'm standing up for him, or anything like that; but it's only fairness to hear him, Mr. Todd."

Wilberforce shook his head doubtfully.

"He's a liar—to say it without unkindness, poor chap! And to give a liar the chance to speak is only to darken wisdom and increase doubt. We know what Nelly is—truthful as light—and she's spoken and made it very clear. He went so near to offer her marriage as he dared go, and vowed he wanted to come to me as soon as he'd mastered what he could learn at Brunel's Tower. That was all lying, because he never wanted Nelly, more than any other man ever wanted her, and he never meant to leave Brunel's Tower if he could help it. So he plotted very cleverly indeed—according to his lights; but his light was darkness when he came before a righteous man, and now we'll hope

that, thanks to this great and terrible lesson, he'll never slip again, and be a credit to himself and his fellow-creatures yet."

"I'd dearly like to know just how it went between him and your granddaughter," said Joanna. "In fact, that's why I've come. It cannot matter now, for he's gone, and I dare say none of us will ever see him again. But just for the interest of it, as a bit of human nature, I should like to know—not what Nelly thinks he meant, but what he really meant."

"I'm with my girl there," answered the old man. "She's no great hand at dreaming or inventing. What he said she reported—some time after, I grant; but she made no mistake: the matter was too personal for that; therefore, if she could say he very near offered marriage and it was trembling on the tip of her tongue, you may feel sure that it was so."

Upon a matter so delicate, Joanna did not venture to reply. She knew that it was the dream of Nelly's life to find a man to love her, and she had thought in the past, when Porter began to spend so much time with the Todds, that he was honestly attracted to her friend; but the sequel had shown her mistake, and the secret sense of relief that Porter was free, though with so many sins upon his head, had induced Joanna to take the catastrophe less to heart than anybody else involved. She believed in her own power, and suspected that once in touch with the lonely Porter, she might save the situation between him and her father; but the problem was to find him. Here again it seemed that Providence was on her side, for

though Mr. Todd had heard nothing of the youth's movements and received no communication from him, that day and hour brought the news that Joanna sought.

Nelly came in presently, and urged Joanna to stop to tea.

"I've a bit of news," she said, "and though I suppose you, at Brunel's Tower, don't feel no more interest than we do here, yet it came to me in the street—just by chance—that creature, you know—that your father flung out. I've swore to God I'll never let his name come on my lips no more, and I never will. But there it is: I met a boy from Cornwood in Torquay an hour ago. He's a nipper that works at Erme Clay-Pit, and he's here for a week's holiday with his uncle, who's a gardener. And he tells me that—you know—has got work out of Luther Crispin!"

"Crispin was terrible pleased with the young fellow," said Mr. Todd. "In fact, he made a clear offer, and no doubt Porter minded it in the time of trouble. Luther said he'd always give him rough work if he was in want of work. And Porter said he'd never leave Brunel's Tower until he came to Todd's—a rogue!"

"I'd like to have heard what he said to Mr. Crispin and Mr. Fincher," continued Nelly; "for you may be sure it wasn't the truth. If he'd told them that, they'd have dared him to come inside their gates."

"What was the truth?" asked Joanna. "We know the main facts, of course; but not the particulars of how he got round you and wormed the secret out of you."

"You can't expect me to go all over that," answered the elder girl. And then, with gusto and bitterness, she did go all over it, at inordinate length. Her story was superficially true in most respects; but it deviated from truth in one vital particular, and so became stained with falsehood throughout. Joanna could not contradict her, but believing the absolute truth was now within her reach, listened patiently.

"Grandfather was gone to Harford, and we sat by the bridge, and he said he'd like, before anything else in the world, to come and work at Todd's—if I'd wish it; and I said I'd got no objection—why should I have? Then he said that was the best word he'd ever heard, and swore he'd got no secrets from me, and that I could trust him to keep secrets himself. Then he made fierce love to me, and said he'd never wanted to please anybody like he wanted to please me. And I believed him."

She began to cry, and Mr. Todd rose up and went out.

"He hates to see me weep," she said. "If he was a younger man, he'd go after that scoundrel and flog the skin off his bones."

"Don't tell me any more, if it hurts you to remember it," answered the other.

"I meant to tell you—I want you to know. You always spoke and felt kindly to him. You'd better be warned. It might have been your turn next, if your father had not been what he is. You needn't look at me while I tell it. Then—then he asked me to call him by his Christian name, and how could I say I wouldn't? I loved him by that

time, and he made me believe he loved me. He swore he'd never asked a girl to call him his name before. For that matter, he said the only girls he knew in the world, beside me, were you, and that woman one of your painters is going to marry. So there it was, and of course it had to be, and we were 'Nelly' and—his name—to each other. It went on like fire, as such things do, I suppose, and he made me think that he was only living for me, and honest as the day. Then, in the midst of his love-making, he got nibbling at other things, and was after the secrets of Todd's, and said that, of course, when grandfather died, I'd have to carry on the pottery and know all there was to know. He'd got me dazed-like, or I'd have seen through it, no doubt; but none had ever made love to me before, and it seemed all true and beautiful and—and he begged me to be terrible careful to keep the secret close, and then—just when he was going on to offer marriage—grandfather came up. You see how clear I've got it all. I wish to God it wasn't so clear and I could forget it."

"Perhaps you will, now you've told me," said Joanna. "Often the best way to get a thing out of the mind is to tell it again."

"That's not all. A bit later we went up to Tristis Rock and had our dinner, and we showed him Harford Moor and the new works, where your father's interested up over. Then grandfather went forward to the clay-pit, and we stopped behind, and he was on to me again. He squeezed my hand and all that, and I felt we was certain to be man and wife. 'Twas all done, but

the question and answer; and he knew well enough what the answer would be. I showed him the works presently, and then he wormed it out of me —the secret of the granite gravel we buy at Erme Clay-Pit from off the shores of the old lakes. You've heard the rest. In fact, you had a hand in it. As for him, he said it was a great compliment to be trusted so finely. He didn't know there was such a woman as I was in the world. And all that and more. There was the feeling of a complete and close understanding—secrets shared. He'd told me that he'd leave Brunel's Tower the first minute he could—so that put him in my power in a manner of speaking; and then he got our secret out of me. I read this exchange of secrets to be a sign of how much we loved one another, of course. And on top of the way he squeezed my hand and everything—— But I shall tire you. No doubt troubles overtake girls every day. That was all there was to it, anyhow. From that very day, you may say, he began to cool off—gently at first, then quicker and quicker. He's a cunning devil, and I hope grandfather will warn Mr. Crispin to send him off, now he knows he's there. He'll never be no use to man or woman; and, as for me, I hate the ground he treads on; and I shouldn't be a human girl if I didn't."

She wept, and Joanna found herself strangely silent. In the face of this story, it seemed that the least she could do was to sympathize with the teller and echo her sentiments respecting the hero of it. But the younger was incapable of pretending much that she did not feel, and the narrative did not wholly convince her. So things seemed to

Nelly, no doubt, but the other felt uncertain. For a few moments she was silent; then, seeing at least that Nelly was entitled to a friend's profound commiseration, she offered it.

The things that she said, however, lacked salt for Nelly, because they left out Harvey Porter and any adequate criticism of the young man. With a swiftness of mind exhibited by the most stupid of women under certain excitation, she found that Joanna, while sorry enough for her and in genuine sympathy with her griefs, did by no means share her estimate of Porter; and that being so her sympathy was vain. Indeed, it only served to irritate Nelly, and presently she showed it, and permitted her spleen to run over.

"Why can't you say what your father said to my grandfather?" she snapped out suddenly. "You talk plain as a rule, like your father, and he said that the man was a wicked rogue and an evil-minded rascal and a blot on the earth, not fit to breathe the same air as honest men. Why can't you say that, Joanna?"

"Because I don't think it, Nelly."

"Not after what I've told you! Then you needn't pretend to be a friend of mine no more, for you ain't. If you was a friend, you'd like to see that wretch suffering for his sins."

"No doubt he is, Nelly."

"Not him! It's only pain—pain in his flesh and bones that would make him suffer; and if I had a brother, or any man alive that cared about me, he should suffer it. And perhaps some day I'll find somebody to take my side."

"You're very friendly with Mr. Masters?"

"Him! I was—I grant that. But of course when— There—you'd better go. I've said a bit too much. No doubt you want that man for yourself, and wondered why he cooled off to you when—or perhaps you knew all about it all the time and was laughing at me with him, and—"

"Yes, I had better go," said Joanna. "You're mad for the minute, Nelly, or you'd never have thought, let alone said, such a wicked thing as that. Don't you know me better than to dare? I'm sorry for all you've suffered—nobody is sorrer—but when you turn upon me and link me with him, you do a very insulting thing; and till you say you're sorry for it I'll never speak to you again."

She went away, yet when she was gone blamed herself more than she blamed Nelly. She could not define her own discontent or explain a subconscious satisfaction deep in her heart. That it was in her heart, rather than in her head, she knew. Even Nelly's sudden assault put her to no lengthened pain. She guessed at the ache of the other, and found it easy to forgive her. For herself, the great task was to reconcile her father to Porter, and find some way by which it might be possible to bring them together again.

But circumstances proved that the task was likely to be difficult. Indeed, it looked more hopeless as time passed, for when George Easterbrook was told by Joanna whither Porter had gone and where he was now employed, her father declared that Mr. Crispin should know the truth.

"There's no place on earth where he can be trusted and evil's his good, so it will be Crispin's

turn next. And it shan't be said that I might have warned him and did not. He must know; and when I'm next at Harford Moor he shall know."

CHAPTER V

TOM BODY AND THE UNKNOWN

THOMAS BODY was stricken with grave illness, for he had now grown indifferent to common physical precautions. He began to die, and he knew it and was very sorry. Paul Pitts often went to see him, and contrasted the old man's bitter regret at going with the little he had to leave. Tom often spoke sanely enough of the past and future. His tale of days he highly esteemed, and declared that life had been a good thing, not valued enough until ended. As for the future, he confessed himself in deep doubts, yet blamed himself for doubting.

There came a dinner-hour when Joanna and Paul visited Mr. Body together, and sat an hour beside him. He lived in a room at Hele with an old married couple, and they cared much for him, and were very sad that he was to perish.

Joanna brought a bunch of flowers from her garden and set it beside the sick man. He was propped up, and had a little board upon his lap with a lump of clay upon it. He could still roll marbles, but was grown too weak to employ himself thus for long at a time.

"I'm fond of the clay yet," he said, "and still can show my power over it, you see. For all the

aches and pains it has given me, I'm terrible sorry to leave it; and yet, in a manner of speaking, I shan't leave it; for what is death but going back to it and being equal with it again? Clay's the covering, first and last. The Lord has willed that every immortal soul, when it comes in the world, must have a suit of clothes, Paul Pitts; and that suit of clothes be clay; and when a man dies, it ain't the man we put away, but only his worn-out garments. I'm glad to think the red earth of me will go back to the red earth of the land; but though a painful load, bent and bruised and cracked a bit by weight of years, I'm sorry enough to lay it down."

"You must look ahead, Tom."

"I do; and it's all a puzzle. Because when you balance up the little cleverness we win in this world against what they be likely to demand in heaven, it looks nought. Take potting. I go up with all my potting cleverness—for I'm so clever as ever I was—not like Sophia Medway, who'd passed her prime and was worn out. I go full of skill and understanding; and yet all that I know must be but a flea's-bite against the skill of heaven. If there's cloam there, then the angel potters have thrown in heavenly patterns since the beginning; and what chance has a poor strange man against them?"

"They'll teach you what they know," said Joanna; "and they'll find you ever so quick to learn, Thomas."

"I hope so—I hope so; but sometimes a cruel fear comes over me that there won't be no potting at all. It may be all gold and silver and precious

stones up there—all metal-work and the craft of the silversmith put first."

"Even if that's so, you'll be called to good, useful work," declared Mr. Pitts.

"I'd hate to be a beginner, however," answered the other. "There's something indecent to my view in a man up over seventy as a beginner."

"We're all beginners there, I reckon. Worldly wisdom and worldly skill in arts and crafts won't sum up to much there, Tom."

"That's what I'm fearing. Yet I can't think that seventy years' work is to go for nothing. 'Tis only in my down-daunted moments I fear it. When I'm up and my trust is at the strongest, I like best to believe that heaven's only a better earth—not too much unlike, else the strangeness will make humans unhappy instead of full of joy. I think them that like work, such as me and you, will be allowed to work; for you know very well what eternal life would be to you without work. And if work, then the work we can do. My mind runs on the clay in heaven—perfect stuff like all else is perfect there. There will be potting, and I shall die in that firm hope and trust, Paul Pitts."

"A great thought, my old dear," answered the artist. "And you've as much right to your opinion as any other man. The arts of heaven, and the crafts of heaven, and the beautiful things turned out by them whose past-master is God's self! For my part, I don't see why not. All that's peaceful and useful and precious for the human eye and heart might be as good there as here. There won't be millions of men tied up in armies and battleships—that's one thing. There'll

be no great forces held on leash for the safety of heaven. No doubt everybody is called to be useful there, and there will be no useless creatures. In such an existence as that, life, for the least as well as for the greatest, would be a dignified thing with nothing mean or sordid about it. And you, who have made of your life a thing dignified by good work here—be sure you'll go from strength to strength there, and have work you can do and be proud to do. And if there's nothing to call work—if work is only a human thing—seemly here, but improper in heaven—then there will be occupation and a way to pursue agreeably to the Almighty Mind and becoming immortal souls.”

“Away from pots, I'm nought; and if a man's nought to himself, then fifty heavens can be no use to him,” replied the sufferer. “I go to my reward as Thomas Body, potter, and the eye I open when my human eyes shut forever—the first thing it will want to rest on is a kiln or a clay-pit. And that's where we, who have done honest work, will be in a better case than those misguided creatures who have passed their lives in hateful business for which there will be no use above. I don't judge them, no more than you do, Paul Pitts; but I do say that the soldiers and sailors and lawyers and middlemen, though all will be saved by the mercy of the sleepless Lord—yet there'll be a good pinch of lemon in their sugar when they find they've gleaned nought that's grain for heaven, and will have to begin all over again, and leave all their heathen, savage cleverness and tricks of the trade behind them.”

“Man's weakness demands these crafts,” an-

swered Pitts, who always took Thomas seriously. "You mustn't blame human beings for entering on professions that society cries out for and are well paid in consequence. Take doctors and dentists, Tom; please God their occupation's gone in heaven, and all their hoarded skill and experience no more than the sand-castles a little child makes on the beach when the tide's out; but it isn't the occupation: it's the training and discipline begot by the occupation that makes us useful material for heaven. To do your duty is the very highest that king or tinker can reach to. The duty is nought in itself, for the best we can do is nothing from a heavenly standpoint; but the doing of it with all our might and strength is everything. And we, that strive to do it up to the hilt, according to the fulness of the power that's given us, are qualifying for greater work in a greater world—work that's not stained by poor human limitations, or poor human needs and weaknesses."

"Potting is potting all the same, and my eternal life won't be a finished thing without it," prophesied Mr. Body. Then he turned to Joanna.

"Your nosegay minds me of a dream I had last night," he said. "I was in the show-room, along with a lot of the things, and the roses and daffies was talking to the pots, and the pots was talking to the roses and daffies. And the chatter you wouldn't believe! It didn't surprise me, however, for I well knew that by night the things broke out like that. And your dragons lighted down off their pots, Paul Pitts, and went frisking about among the vases; and the big 'uns vaunted themselves above the little 'uns, and the little 'uns

pulled the tails of the big 'uns and then ran away and hid. And the flowers grew and budded out and died and sprang up again. But behind all this business of creatures and flowers the pots stood steady and solemn, and I felt all the rest was passing trash and of little account. The pots are the everlasting creatures, and the flowers and dragons slight things. They pass, as we men and women pass; but the earth remains."

"What did the pots say to my roses, Tom?" asked Joanna. She was sitting by him and stroking his hand.

"I wish I knew. I can't understand their language. I hope I'll dream the dream again. I've thought these many years that I'd like to be at one with the clay and feel what it feels and think its thoughts. But if I could do that I should be as wise as the Creator."

He was silent, then suddenly sang in a sort of whisper:

"The bud for the bullfinch,
The mouse for the owl,
The grass for the coney,
The seed for the fowl.

"The fly for the spider,
The tin for the pan,
The clay for the pot,
And the maid for the man."

"Well done," said Mr. Pitts. "Your memory's as good as ever, Tom."

"I'll sing that in heaven," declared Mr. Body. "But I'm tired out now and want to sleep. So best you go. I'm more than grateful for the sight of you. It's a sign of how they rate him when well folk visit a sick man. Nobody likes doing it,



and it calls for a high sense of duty or a good pinch of love to do it. Because nature turns from the sight of disease and death by instinct, like sheep shiver at the smell of a slaughter-house.

. . . I sang my song in the dead of the night, Paul Pitts—the song I just sang to you. But I'm gone too weak in the tubes to sing any more. You've heard it for the last time."

They spoke comfortable words and took their leave of him. They were in a sober and quiet mood, and Paul declared that he should miss the veteran not a little.

"Meek and mild he was after his mind faded," said Mr. Pitts. "And the studio won't be quite the studio to me without the poor old boy in his corner twaddling away."

But Joanna's thoughts were already elsewhere. She had a matter on her mind and discussed it now.

"I wish you'd talk of Harvey Porter for a minute before we get back to the works, Uncle Paul. I ask, because my plan to let a bit more time pass won't do now."

"Why not?"

"Father's going to Cornwood next week. You know he can't get Harvey out of his head, and though Mr. Todd last Sunday said he didn't want to hear any more about it, and begged father to let the past be past, yet father's overmastered by it still."

"Same as you are, for that matter."

"Only because father is. Father's never been like this in his life before."

"His life began long before you knew anything

about it, Joanna ; still, I grant this has got a great hold on him. I'd thought, however, that it was dying out—the bitterness of it. He's listened quiet enough to my sermons."

"What he said to me yesterday shows it is not dying out. He's going to the new clay-works on Harford Moor, and he's going to the Erme Clay-Pit afterwards—to see Mr. Crispin."

"But not——?"

"Yes. He wants him to know just the truth about Harvey, so that he shan't be acting in the dark and 'nourishing a serpent unawares.' That was his word, and it shows he hasn't forgotten or forgiven. I'm cut in half, and yet that's not the word. I don't want father to do anything that's unjust to Harvey Porter; and I don't want him to do anything that's unjust to himself. And it would be unjust and unnatural and contrary to his own character if father did anything revengeful against him."

"You needn't fear that. He'll do right by Mr. Crispin, and that won't be doing wrong by the lad. His feeling is that Porter probably got his work under false pretences, and as like as not told Luther Crispin a lot of lies. Well, nobody can say that's improbable. And your father is well in his right and duty to put the Erme people clear about it. He'll do no more than that. If Porter has lied, he deserves to lose his work; if he has told the truth, then what your father will say will only confirm it and credit him."

"But does father know the truth? Does anybody? Are we sure that Nelly Todd's story is

fair? I'm not sticking up for Harvey Porter against truth—only against untruth."

"And what do you want to do about it?" he asked.

"I want to write and warn Harvey that father is going to tell Mr. Crispin what he believes is the truth."

"Don't you do that. It's too like having a secret from your father. Trust time to right this. If the boy's more sinned against than sinning, we shall find it out. Leave it for the present. Let time pass. He did a very wrong and mistaken thing—of that at least there's no doubt—and if the means were not as bad as they look, so much the better. He's with good plain dealers—Crispin and Fincher—and he'll learn with them, just as he'd have learnt at Brunel's Tower, that honesty is the best policy—at any rate, if your lot is cast with honest men. Time is the last thing you young creatures trust, though youth might safely do so. 'Tis only the old, with little time left, who have learned to trust it. But practise patience, and don't write behind your father's back. That won't help the right."

Joanna promised to obey; and she had her reward, as it seemed, for that evening Easterbrook returned to the subject of his visit to Cornwood, and declared that he wished his daughter to go with him.

"You'll help to pass the journey for me," he declared. "My own thoughts don't satisfy me for the minute, and I'd rather talk than be thinking."

The avowal served to illustrate in a manner

very startling that great upset of mind and inversion of opinions that had overtaken the master. He strove mightily to make this catastrophe harmonize with certain rules of life and philosophy that experience of many years had led him to believe sound and sure based; but he could not; and it was not only his tormented memory of Harvey Porter and the existing sense of loss that fretted his nerves, but also an even wider and more desolating consciousness: that the convictions of a lifetime had played him false. The result of these experiences shook him out of his accustomed stability, and the spectacle, from the standpoint of Paul Pitts, was a pathetic one; while to his daughter the phenomenon proved more exasperating than sentimental; because she felt a doubt of her father's justice, and could not perceive that it was the personal element of affection for Porter which had complicated his line of action and destroyed his usual attitude of patience and reason before the problems of life.

He had argued once or twice, after hearing of Porter's visit to Brunel's Tower by night, that the young man must be mad; but Joanna, from her point of vision, thought in private that it was her father who must be mad to entertain his present views of the question. Thus she, too, erred a little; and perhaps between the extremes of her father's estimate and her own unreasoning championship, the truth promised to appear.

She declared that it would be a pleasure to go with him to Cornwood and Harford; but did not hint at the amount and quality of the interest lying behind that pleasure.

CHAPTER VI

BESIDE ERME

HARVEY PORTER, heartened by his interview with Mr. Punchard, set forth to the destination he had planned. He crossed country, and then for many hours he tramped without molestation on the railway. After dawn he was at a siding, where the new light line from Harford Moor reached the main line, and drying-sheds were already built for the yield. Here Porter left the permanent way, tramped north-west, and at last arrived very weary at the hamlet of Harford.

He remembered that Luther Crispin had expressed great friendliness, and offered to give him work if he should need it; but he also remembered the conditions under which he was now about to apply for work. His mighty experience had opened Harvey's eyes to the apparent value of truth in the estimation of men, and to the fact that George Easterbrook, the only man in the world for him, rated conduct higher than success. His indignation was quite dead, and a sensation of blank weariness followed it. Then came the elation of his night visit to Mr. Punchard, and the thought of the message he left behind him. He hoped that Samuel would correctly deliver it. But before the dawn he was again cast down and doubtful. He designed to tell Mr. Crispin the

truth, and suspected that it might not stand him in good stead. Yet here the truth was vital, because Crispin stood in close connection with those who had filled Porter's recent past. There were the Todds to reckon with, and the Easterbrooks also. The truth must be told, therefore, since Mr. Crispin and Mr. Fincher were bound sooner or later to hear it. Indeed, they might already have done so. To find work with him after Mr. Crispin knew the truth seemed improbable; but Porter felt that it was worth attempting, for the old man had offered friendship.

Luther Crispin was a bachelor, and of easy mind. He came from ancient yeoman stock, and rather prided himself upon it. He was stout, laughter-loving, and disinclined to take himself or his affairs too seriously. His partner also amused the world, but for different reasons. Anthony Fincher stood six feet three, and was thin, grey, anxious, and wife-ridden. Five of his children lived, and three lay in the churchyard just outside the home. Mrs. Fincher always held the most promising had fallen.

"A very curious, fatal thing," she declared, "that when a child takes after me, it dies; and them that favour Fincher always live. Amy and Annie and my eldest, Jonathan, were all the living daps of me, and now they're dust; and John and Wilfred and Charles are their father over again; and Mary's half and half; and as for the babby, he's got my bustling character, though but three years old, and I'm feared of my life I'll lose him."

The partners agreed well. The larger share of

Erme Clay-Pit profits belonged to Mr. Crispin, who had found capital to revive the venture at a critical moment in its story; but Anthony Fincher was learned in the kaolin, and his knowledge had gone far to save the situation. Mr. Crispin possessed no near relations, and was fond of Amy Fincher's children; so she arrested all grumbling when her husband felt disposed to complain that he worked twice as hard as his partner.

They lived not far from each other, and Mary Fincher, a maiden of twenty, kept house for Luther, and was supposed to be his heiress.

Before the dark-haired, tall and thin Mary did Harvey Porter appear at a moment when Mr. Crispin was eating his breakfast. The traveller begged to see him, and, on Mary inquiring his business, gave her his name. Then he set down his bundle on the door-step, and sat on it till she returned.

"Master will see you if you'll step this way," she said; and Harvey went before Mr. Crispin.

He wasted no time, but asked for food.

"And welcome," said Luther. "What the mischief brings you here, I wonder? And a bundle, too! That means you've left Easterbrook and Pitts', I suppose—more fool you!"

"I didn't leave; I was fired out," said Porter. "I'll eat, since you're so kind as to let me, and then I'll tell you."

"Fired out!"

Porter nodded, with his mouth full. He ate fast, and since Mr. Crispin did not speak again, he had finished his breakfast as soon as the old man. But then Luther himself showed an in-

cination to talk. He asked after his friends, and declared it high time that Nelly Todd and her grandfather came to see him again.

"A nice girl, and I'm fond of her. 'Tis a curious thing that I'm a father in my instincts, yet never desired to be one in reality. If I could have had children without marriage and without sin, I don't say it wouldn't have been done, for I dote on the toads—specially maidens; but a wife was an experiment I had no pluck to make. For that matter, I've always set my face against lotteries, or betting, or getting or losing anything for nothing. In marriage a man always has more or less than he deserves, and generally less. So I'm single. Then, again, there's the children. If marriage is a lottery, good children are a flat miracle; but the by-stander with a heart towards them can pick and choose the miracles, and not be called upon to befriend or father the usual sort. A real father's got to take the rough with the smooth—the bad ones as well as the good; but if you adopt a young creature or two, so they're not too young, you needn't take any but the most promising specimens. I've got a lot of young things I'm fond of, and shan't forget; but they are all good young things—so far—and that being so, of course they're mostly girls. For, in my experience, girls are meeker, and kinder, and gratterfuller, and easier than boys. I tell you these things for a reason. And perhaps, so clever are you, that you guess it."

The visitor spoke.

"You want me to know that you'd have no use for a young man that was bad. And because I'm

turned out of Brunel's Tower you reckon I've done something bad."

"Exactly," answered Mr. Crispin. "You know I liked you at first sight—you took my fancy, as a nice young youth with rather more than your share of wits; but if you've used those wits wickedly, then I'll be the first to send you about your business."

"I want justice," said Porter.

"Justice is a very tricky adventure, even for them that can afford to go where it is sold. You've got to wade through a lot of muck to reach the throne of justice," answered the old man. "I've known many who wanted justice, and who went about to get it. And they got it, or what passed for it; and never one allowed the game was worth the candle."

"Justice and a fair hearing from you I want, sir, if you are in the mind to grant it."

"It happens that I am," answered Luther. "Nowadays, owing to the drawing power of towns on the young mind, and also the attraction of picture advertisements of Canada, it isn't as easy as it used to be to get clay-cutters at fifteen bob a week. One man's meat is another man's poison; and though I wouldn't go so far as to say that the education of the poorer classes is the poison of the employers, yet it works out like that. If the Trades Unions, instead of snapping and snarling at the masters for the sake of the men, would pour out their thousands on the better education of the children, our goose would be cooked in half the time it's going to take to do it. But though the revolution is sighted, and we shall soon be the

under-dog, and the labourer worth a great deal more than his hire, yet, for the minute, I will hold and maintain that a clay-cutter should have fifteen shillings a week, and no more. These chaps be always shouting for better wages because of their wives and families, you must know; but what I venture to say—humbly as a worm, of course—is just this: we pay a man for the clay he cuts, not for the children he gets, or the way his wife dresses. It's for what a man does for us in the pit we pay him, not for what he may do for himself outside. They won't understand that, and think because they've been busy after getting a score of children, their wages ought to be lifted up. But to have a long family don't make a man cut clay any cleverer in my experience. And now we want another hero at fifteen bob this instant moment. So if you can show me why I should not refuse to engage you, I'll be glad."

"I've done wrong," said Porter; "but I'm learning, and I won't do no more wrong in that direction. I thought I was doing right, but Mr. Easterbrook thought I was doing wrong, so he sent me off. It was an ungrateful thing to do, because all the trouble I took was for him; but there it is: he couldn't see it, just because the thing I did stood for nothing against the way I did it."

"What did you do? Let's hear the worst. And I warn you I'll give you up if you've broke the law."

"I don't know what I broke," said Harvey. "I've broke myself—none else. I thought the battle was to the strong, and that might was right,

and that fools had to suffer for being fools, according to nature.”

“That’s where man’s gentler than nature. ’Tis the greatest good to the greatest number, if you’re a Christian; and since the greatest number be fools, it’s right and proper we think of them first—that’s Socialism. I don’t say I hold with it altogether; but it’s going to be the way the world’s run; and they’ve got a good case, though I feel a doubt if it can be done inside nature. She’s all against equality, and always have been.”

“Todd’s pottery make big vases that are worth a lot of money,” explained Porter, “and we at Brunel’s Tower had tried in vain to find out how they were made. Then I set to work to find out how. And I did find out how. At your clay-pits I found out—at least, I was told. I’d meant to find out, I grant, and I’d made friends with Nelly Todd, hoping some day to get it out of her. I grant that, too. Then, all of a sudden, owing to getting very fond of me, she told me the secret herself. I wanted to have a bit of a sporting hunt for it, but she threw it at me; she would tell me, and she did tell me. And then I knew.”

“She told you!”

“She did. It was that beach gravel that comes from your pit—you know; and next time I was there—with Miss Easterbrook—you remember—I took a lot of that gravel as well as the clay I pretended to want. ’Twas all nonsense about clay for slip, and only an excuse to get a sack of the gravel. And it turned out just as Nelly Todd said, and I ground it and mixed it, and made a pot as big as Todd’s pots. When he saw it, Mr. Easter-

brook went in triumph to Todd's, and then old Mr. Todd told him I'd sneaked the secret out of Nelly Todd by pretending to fall in love with her, and that after I'd got the secret I'd chucked her. And, hearing that, the master came back, and smashed my work, and dismissed me."

"And what had you got to say?"

"A lot. Only he wouldn't hear. It's clear that he attached a great deal of importance to my making friends with Nelly Todd, and no doubt that was a very wrong thing to do. But, as I tell you, the young lady gave me the secret of her own free-will. In fairness, though, I don't think she would have done so if I hadn't hinted I wanted to leave Brunel's Tower and come to Todd's. I pretended that."

"Did you offer to marry her?"

"I did not. I should have laughed out loud and given it all away if I'd done that. It was too ridiculous—a beggar like me offering for a rich girl like her."

"But you pretended to be very fond of her."

"I pretended more than I felt; but I didn't pretend altogether. I was fond of her in a sort of way. She's a very nice girl, and was very kind to me."

"And you repaid the kindness by trying to ruin her grandfather?"

"I didn't try to ruin her grandfather, sir. I never thought of her grandfather. I wanted to do a fine stroke for Mr. Easterbrook—that's all."

"It's a very bad story against you."

"So it seems, sir."

"Ain't you properly ashamed?"

"I haven't had time for anything like that. I dare say it will come over me later. But it was such a fearful thing, being chucked out of Brunel's Tower, that I've been rather upset and my mind has been all over the shop."

Mr. Crispin mused, and stared at Porter while he did so. There was a brief silence.

"How does it strike you, sir?" asked the young man presently.

"Well, I believe you've told me the bare truth. You may have done it as a reformed character; or you may have done it because you knew I was dead certain to find it out. I'll give you the benefit of the doubt, and hope this business has saved you on the first step downward. And since you've been true for once, I'll be true, as I always am. Nelly Todd's one of my favourites, and I'm sorry this has happened to her; and if you made her think you wanted to marry her when you didn't it was a very wicked thing indeed. But you say you didn't go so far as that of malice afore-thought, but only pretended more than you felt for the sake of the secret. And I always told Fincher the secret was in the gravel, and he wouldn't believe it, so that's one to me."

"A twentieth part to the clay, sir, ground fine and mixed with it."

"You forget all about that, and listen to me. As no harm is done, I'm free to look at this from outside, and I may tell you that it's wonderful what a difference it makes to the judgment if painful things happen to yourself, or happen to somebody else. I never met the fellow-creature who could feel for me properly when I'd had a tooth

out—not, that is, like I felt for myself. You can't make another know the pang you feel yourself—they haven't got the imagination, for one thing; and for another, they're nearly always too busy; and for another, they know only too well that it will be their turn next to smart somewhere. So they keep their pity against the time they'll want it for private use. Pity's like charity; it begins at home. In fact, only them above pain can properly feel for pain; and that's why there's many tears shed in heaven when the angels have time to look down at our writhings and hear our groans. So there it stands, and I confess that I can't feel all these people felt—these folks you've used so shamefully. I'm properly shocked at you, Porter, and so on; but I see signs of grace in you, and I'm a lot put about for a clay-cutter; so if you'll promise me, before God's Throne, to lead an honourable and proper life, and never do nothing like this again, I'll give you a try."

"Thank you kindly, sir."

"You mustn't look back with envy and hatred and malice, or anything like that."

"I don't feel no such feelings. I'm only terrible puzzled about it all. I can't see a lot of points in it."

"Trust me to clear them up gradually," said Mr. Crispin. "And if I can't, life will. You must do as I tell you, and sing small for a bit, and not take too much upon yourself."

"I'll be full of gratitude, I'm sure."

"You needn't be. Gratitude may lead a chap with your views into trouble seemingly. So just do your work and draw your wages, and don't feel

gratitude except where you can't pay it—to Heaven. We don't want no secrets—Fincher and me. He's got enough behind his own door, poor soul! You go to the pump, and ask Mary for a brush and comb, and then you and I will walk over to my partner."

"Shall I tell him all I've told you, mister?"

"No. I'll tell him. For the minute, he'd forgive a clay-cutter out of work almost anything. But I doubt you're too done to work to-day. We'll find you a lodging, and you can begin at cock-light to-morrow morning. Very likely he'll take you himself."

"What shall you say if Mr. Easterbrook asks you about it, sir?"

"I shall say that I've heard your story, and tell him what you've told me, word for word. I shall say you came to me broke—to make good—and that, being a reasonable man, and wanting a clay-cutter uncommon bad, I gave you another chance."

"I'd like to make good, I'm sure—to show him."

"Never mind about him now," replied Mr. Crispin. "You've got to show me—not him. You've been an outrageous sort of person with him on your own confession. Now you've got to let me and Mr. Fincher find how much you've learned by experience, and try how properly useful you can be to us. My own goddaughter, too! I'm sure I don't know what my old friend, Wilberforce Todd, will say when he hears I've took you on."

"'Tis a curious thing in the world to me," declared Porter, "how much everybody cares for what everybody else will say. I haven't felt that

yet. I never seem to care a button what anybody else will say about me, so long as I'm satisfied with myself."

"And that's the last thing you are, I should hope," answered Mr. Crispin; "for when you find a young man properly pleased with himself, it's almost any odds that he's the only one that is. Now you'd best come and see Anthony Fincher. He's not such an easy soul as I am, and a good bit younger, and a good bit readier for a row. Life's harder for him than for me, and so he's less troubled to see it pinch other people."

But the long and lantern-jawed Fincher was only too pleased to find a clay-cutter. Porter's past did not trouble him: he felt solely concerned with his future. The day was spent in visiting the works, and since a lodging might not easily be found, and Mrs. Fincher liked Harvey's way with some of her younger children, she offered him a corner of a stable loft and the privilege of board for the space of one week for five shillings and sixpence. He consented gladly, and, after dinner, went to his loft, brought up a mattress and bedding, and a deal box for his clothes. He then retired, and slept till five o'clock the next morning. Half an hour later he had joined the Finchers at breakfast, and after six o'clock, well rested, fresh and keen for the new work, he was off to the pit with Anthony.

He found Mr. Fincher's philosophy of a cast more sombre than that suggested by Mr. Crispin. Life, that passed pretty pleasantly for Luther, bewildered Mr. Fincher.

"They say God tempers the wind to the shorn

lamb," he declared, "and it's no doubt it happens in some cases—like my partner's, for instance. Such a man as him—rich, easy, without wife or child—has got a howling lot of penniless relations barking at his heels night and day in the usual course of nature. But he's been spared that. And you're one of the lucky ones, too; for to find work just the minute you want it, as you have done, is a very blessed act of Providence for you. But I warn you not to be too hopeful, and not to think, because you've had this remarkable bit of good luck—to get work at Erme Clay-Pit, and be taken in by Mrs. Fincher—I warn you not to suppose that's a sample of life. Far from it. Such things seldom happen to the deserving poor, let alone the undeserving. And I'm sure I hope you'll mark what has been done by your Maker for you, in the shape of Mr. Crispin and myself, and reward us to the best of your power."

"I'll try to," said Porter. He felt that Anthony was a slight man. Mr. Fincher's life evidently puzzled him, and for an adult being to go dazed by his own existence struck Porter as mean. He suspected that Mr. Fincher was a fool. He could hardly imagine a man with ten children being anything else. But he found Mrs. Fincher very far from a fool; and so well pleased was she with Harvey and his ways that, after a fortnight's probation, it was arranged he should stop with the Finchers. He was no clay-cutter, and soon showed it; yet his cleverness, suavity and quickness of observation combined to make him useful to the partners. He had ideas, and offered suggestions. He mastered the simple business of the clay very

swiftly, and pointed out trifling errors, where energy and time were wasted. His behaviour was exemplary, and he did not obtrude his own views on his elders, but only submitted them. It seemed, conversely, that their simple and conventional values began to be appreciated by Porter. At any rate, he respected them, and expressed no further dissension when they were enunciated before him.

He was tamed after his great and harsh experience. To those who had known him, the change would have been more apparent than it was to his new friends. But he was dreary and listless as compared with his behaviour in the past. Only by slow degrees did his disaster become less tragical to reflect upon. He began to see that, right or wrong, his ideas were undesirable, and were not calculated to make him friends with the herd of men. But he depended entirely on the herd, and felt that he could not afford to quarrel with it again. There were dangers everywhere, it seemed, and presently he found that Mr. Fincher did not like Mr. Crispin to be too friendly with him. Indeed, Mr. Fincher soon suspected Porter of seeking to win Mr. Crispin to the detriment of certain young Fincher boys destined to carry on the Erme Clay-Pit. He feared that Porter might influence his senior partner, and even cloud the claims of the less attractive John and Wilfred Fincher. But when he submitted these alarms to his wife, Amy Fincher flouted them.

"You breed trouble like a dog breeds fleas," she said. "'Tis your cowardice makes you so suspicious; and I'm sure cowardice is its own punishment, for a coward sees human nature through

blue glasses, and knocks all the light and warmth and hope out of it, and shivers at his own false seeing. Thank your God you married a cork—a woman that can bob up every time, even from the fearful depths you drag me down to. Many married to you would have made a hole in the river before the honeymoon was gone; but I keep on, as steady and patient and cheerful as a canary in a cage. However, it's too much to ask you to know your luck. You've never known it and never will—not till it's put before you at Judgment. Then you'll be made to see the tight shoe of marriage pinched my foot, not yours. And as to this Harvey Porter, you've only got to hear him sing the innocent hymns in church of a Sunday to understand there's no vice in him. I'm his side, and so are John and Wilfred. There's nothing mean or small about him that I've found yet, and the baby trusts him like a dog. And where any baby of mine trusts, there my husband may trust also."

Mrs. Fincher was indeed attracted by Porter. She made a mystery about him and guessed that he was the son of important people—probably stolen by gipsies in his infancy. She professed to distinguish the signs of good blood in his features, his limbs, and his speech.

" 'Tis the aristocratical voice of a person born to rule," she said to Luther Crispin, "and if we knew all there is to know about him, I warrant we should find he was born to rule and only came to serve through misadventure."

Harvey, for his part, took kindly to Mrs. Fincher, and delighted to please her. He was good to her children and helped the boys, John

and Wilfred, to learn figures. One was at the clay-pit; the other worked on a farm. Porter went to church on Sundays, and the little sanctuary dedicated to St. Patrick pleased him. Everything in the building and the service was plain and direct, from the waggon roof and slender granite pillars to the brief services, hearty songs, and cheerful preaching. Opposite him, where he was wont to sit, appeared the cenotaph of a child, and the verse thereon interested Porter. It stood for the values of the people—values that fate had forced so severely upon his notice of late. These things began to challenge his attention and interest. They were not accepted by him as comforting and vital truths, but received as necessary and practical formulæ, if a man wanted to get on with other men. He was still moody in the recesses of his own mind and still bitterly sorry at his fallen fortune; but there were awakening again in his heart the old reverence and esteem of Easterbrook, and along this channel the conventional values began slowly to mean a little more than paths of convenience. Because they represented Easterbrook's way; and Porter began to suspect that what the master believed and practised must belong to a more vital part of life than he had yet supposed. He began to see that morals were not mere Sunday clothes for the mind, as he had imagined.

He knew not why this rough rhyme to commemorate a little dead girl attracted him; but it possessed some subtle power to touch his wondering and inquiring spirit. He found that it had crept

into his memory presently and repeated it to himself sometimes on weekdays :

“Dear to her parents, here doth lie
One much admired for piety,
Of years but nine, yet knew more
Of goodness than some of threescore;
God gives but seldom length of days
To plants of such esteem and praise,
Heaven cannot suffer such a birth
To be long sullied with dull earth;
Cease we then from unjust complaints,
God always loves such early saints.”

Harvey had laughed at first when he read these verses in church. Then they attracted him and finally fascinated him. To think that anybody should be at the pains to make poetry for a child of nine astonished him; and that the verse should be graven and set up in a church astonished him still more. He turned his attention next to the virtues of the dead and guessed that it must have been her extraordinary goodness that won this recognition. It seemed a dreary thought to picture a girl of nine so good; yet he granted the surprising novelty of such a spectacle and perceived what a huge sensation it had evidently caused during her short days. Then he considered the dogma and wondered why the poet was inspired to assert the views of God so confidently. If God loved goodness with such fierce ardour, there must be something in it. To be too good to live any longer at nine years old was doubtless a miracle. His reason tempted him to laugh again; but circumstances had clouded his reason at this period of his life. He found the dictates of his reason did not pay at all; he discovered superstition all round him, and so began vaguely to suppose that the

views propounded on every side must, after all, be the rational views. In that case his own ideas, that broke away from them so completely, must be evil. From seeing that it paid to bend, and that only by bending could he hope for worldly success, he began to suffer from a dreary conviction that right lay with the majority. It seemed natural to suppose it must. And everything conduced to this conviction; because it happened that, for the second time in his short life, he was now thrown into the guardianship and control of honest men, who practised what they preached. He began to believe, therefore, that honesty was the rule of life, and that to evade the examples set before him would be to choose a pariah existence and put himself altogether outside the pale of human sympathy. Had he met with hypocrites, or humbugs, who professed one thing and practised another, he must doubtless have been established in his own predispositions and insurgent bent of mind; but it was his lot again to fall in with men who represented the just attitude of plain dealers, and the effect upon him began to be important.

Porter had worked at Erme Clay-Pit for six weeks when Luther Crispin told him that George Easterbrook was coming.

"He doesn't name you, and he doesn't name his business," said the old man. "But he's to come to have a tell with me on his way back from Hartford Moor. I reckon his daughter will come, too, as like as not. If you take my advice, you'll keep out of the way for their peace. Have no fear they'll hear anything against you from me."

CHAPTER VII

JOANNA AND HARVEY

JOANNA EASTERBROOK possessed the instinct of one who would rather climb and conquer than find all smooth and the road levelled for her feet. Now Fate had set her something in the nature of a task—so at least she believed—and contrasted with the romantic adventure of restoring Porter to her father's esteem, her life and its daily round of daffodils and roses looked exceedingly tedious and tame.

George Easterbrook and his daughter arrived at Cornwood and drove to Harford. He made it clear that he would not see Harvey Porter, but laid no obligation on Joanna, supposing it was not necessary. Therefore, when her father set off to climb to Harford Moor and visit the new works, she proceeded by the valley to Erme Clay-Pit. Presently with a beating heart, she appeared before Luther in his little office and shook the hand that he extended to her.

"Father has gone up the hill," she said, "and when he's had a look round and satisfied himself about a good few matters, he'll come down here to talk to you."

"George Easterbrook will be pleased," declared Mr. Crispin. "Things are humming up over, and of course my partner, who takes a darker view of

life than I do, and is always ready to see misfortune hiding behind every hedge, has decided that our death warrant is being signed there. But threatened men live long, you know, Joanna. How fine you look, to be sure! And I hope the news of Todd's is good and no harm done by this young sinner I've got here?"

"D'you know about it?" she asked.

"No doubt I shall when your father comes along. For the minute I've only had Porter's story, and since it is very much to his discredit, I doubt not it's true. But this I will say to discount that: he doesn't seem to feel to the full what he did. In fact, there's a screw loose in his moral nature; but I think without pride that I'm tightening up that screw. He's falling into line; and whatever your father may say against him, I shall be glad to report that he's not at all bad."

Joanna felt relieved to learn the situation, because, if Porter had told the truth, no great harm could fall upon him. Mr. Crispin, apparently ignorant of the gravity of the offence, asked Joanna presently whether she would like to see Harvey, and she replied that it would give her great pleasure to do so.

"I don't take my father's view exactly," she said, "and no more does Uncle Paul."

"Your Mr. Pitts?"

"Yes. He thought and said just what you said: that there was a screw loose, and we were hoping —when this sad thing fell out."

"He goes back a bit in his havage, I reckon," suspected Luther. "You'll often see a boy try back, like a plant to the old stock. No doubt

among his forbears was a heathen man—fierce and masterful—with no god but his own will, and no sense of right or wrong, but only a terrible keen instinct for pushing himself to the top. The world was full of people like that before policemen and the board-schools and other modern contrivances set in; but nowadays we turn out men in moulds and teach them to think alike and look at right and wrong alike. Of course, all Christians should do so, and true Christianity levels thought and action and crushes ambition and keeps you from thrusting your head above your neighbours—unless just the pinch of the old savage feeling to get up top masters you. Then the layman rises to be a churchwarden and the parson fights on the quiet to be a prebendary or a rural dean. But strictly speaking it's wrong; only nature will out and great gifts must come to the top, despite the Lord's commands."

"Harvey Porter's got great gifts," said Joanna.

"So I believe. And along with them he's also got what isn't always to be seen with great gifts—a very willing disposition. He plays with Anthony Fincher's young childer in a very human spirit, and he'd charm a grizzly bear with his manners."

"He would, I'm sure—play with children, I mean."

"If you go up to the old workings, you'll find him, where they are cutting a trench to drain that big pool."

She went, and Porter, looking up from his spade, suddenly found Joanna within a few yards

of him. To her surprise, he showed no astonishment, though his great pleasure was not hidden, for it made him flush. Seeing that she extended her hand, he plunged his own into the water, cleansed it, dried it, and then shook Joanna's very heartily. As he did so, he explained:

"I knew you were to be here; but I never thought you'd come and speak to me; and I'm very glad you was allowed to do it."

"I don't know anything about that," she said. "My father didn't allow it or forbid it. But I wished it. I'm very glad to see you again, Harvey Porter."

"And I'm properly glad to see you, I'm sure. Shall you tell Mr. Easterbrook you've spoken to me?"

"Certainly I shall."

"I hope he won't be vexed."

"I hope he won't. He's coming to see Mr. Crispin about you. He's not feeling any anger against you, or anything like that now; but he wants to tell Mr. Crispin the facts, and he means Mr. Crispin shall know the truth, in justice to himself."

"He does know the truth," said Harvey; "I've told him the exact truth, and no more and no less."

"Father will be very thankful to hear that. This has tried him a great deal."

"I'll tell you why—because Mr. Easterbrook only heard one side. He heard the Todds; but he didn't hear me; and he knows that wasn't fair."

"The Todds told the truth, I'm sure."

"Why are you sure? Why should everybody

have been so properly ready to believe that girl?
She misunderstood——”

“No, she didn’t. You asked her to call you ‘Harvey.’ ”

“Well—— Good Lord Almighty! That’s nothing.”

“A name means a great deal to a girl,” answered Joanna; “and now you can listen to me a minute before father comes. Have you got my razor still?”

“Yes, I have.”

“Then why don’t you use it?”

“I thought once I’d cut my throat with it. But then I felt life was good enough yet. How did the master take my message from Sam Punc-hard?”

“I don’t know. He never named it to me.”

“I’d do him a good turn to-morrow—that’s my feeling to him now. I soon calmed down. But I should have thought he was above coming here to queer my pitch again.”

“He’s not coming for that, you may be sure. He’s coming because, at the bottom of his heart, he’s terrible sorry you had to go. He cared a lot for you. I’m telling you secrets now.”

“I don’t want your secrets. I’ve had too much of girls’ secrets. All the same, I’m glad he’s sorry he sent me away. But you can’t expect him to confess it—a man such as him, and a master of men. I’m glad and yet I’m almost ashamed to hear he’s sorry. It’s awful to think of such a man sorry for anything he’s done. I didn’t guess for a moment I’d have seen you to-day, else I’d have shaved my chin. I’ve thrown away Nelly

Todd's shaving-brush and bought another. If she'd given me the razor, no doubt you would have said it was bound to cut friendship and all that. But you gave it to me, and you're my friend, I see—else you wouldn't be here now."

Joanna nodded. Then she turned her eyes to the hill.

"Father will be down over there presently. He isn't going to see you. But I've got money for you in my pocket. He thought I'd leave it with Mr. Crispin, I expect. The quarter of the royalty on Ann Hathaway's Cottage. It's done very well this summer."

"He won't see me? Perhaps I wouldn't see him, for that matter. And yet, on the other hand, perhaps I'd go on my knees to him more like. It would depend how he looked at me. But he'll never look at me again. I know that. You've heard this yarn from Nelly Todd, of course?"

"Yes, I have."

"Would it be asking too much to tell me how she put it?"

He listened to the whole story again and did not contradict a word.

"I suppose it looked like that to her," he said scornfully. "I won't stoop to argue about it, or explain where she went wrong, owing to her small mind. I'm sick of it, and I want to wash it all out of my head and forget about it."

"You never will, until you say you're sorry for it."

"Say I'm sorry! Of course I'm sorry. I'm not a fool. Who should be half so sorry as I am? Who's the sufferer but me? You've got sense—

you must see that. Look at Erme Clay-Pit compared with Brunel's Tower; and this blasted, desolate place round about and nobody to speak to all day long, but labourers. Can't you see why I should be sorry?"

"I don't mean that. I mean sorry for hurting father so fearfully and causing him such pain; and for making Nelly unhappy, too."

"We needn't maunder about it," he said. "Nelly is a feeble girl, and she liked the idea of having me for a sweetheart—poor fool!—because she couldn't get a better."

"She's not a fool, Harvey."

"Then why did she think a half-grown chap with only twenty-five pounds in the world was offering to marry her?"

"You pretended it was in your mind. She loved you, and it was natural she should run on a little and take fire, and think you meant it, though whether you meant it in your own heart and changed your mind afterwards is your affair. You wanted to deceive her, or you wouldn't have talked about longing to leave Brunel's Tower. That was a lie, anyway."

"Well, I'll say I'm sorry, then, if that will mend any bones," he answered. "And it's the truth—the honest truth. I've never been so sorry for anything in my life, and never shall be. I've seen a good bit about the inside of things since I came here. There's a lot of hard reality to clay-cutting. I've not been so cold since I was born as I have up here; nor yet so wet and dirty. I go to church on Sundays, and like it—for lack of better things to do. It's a funny world for grown-ups, and fun-

nier still for children. Here I am in hot water for telling a few lies; and here's Mrs. Fincher teaching her children to tell lies—or blaming them for telling the truth, which is the same thing. She slapped her smallest child's head yesterday, because the little creature told Mr. Crispin his hair and his teeth were all gone. But I don't believe no child tells lies until he finds out what a mess truth will land him in. How's mad Tom Body?"

"He's dead—died a fortnight ago. Pretty well all the men were at the funeral. We had it on a Saturday afternoon. Diet in his sleep at last. He had his little board and bit of clay by him to the end."

"He never bore me no ill-will. But Marsland did, I reckon!"

"Rupert Marsland's young woman has thrown him over."

"By gum! I should like to have seen his face when he heard it. The best day's work she ever did for herself."

"He was jealous of you."

"He wouldn't be now."

"No, he wouldn't."

"I wish to God I was back at Brunel's Tower, Joanna. I'd give everything I've got to be back."

"So do I wish you were back."

"That's something! And I'm a lot pleased to think you'd like it."

They were standing where he had stood with Nelly Todd above the little green lake. He remembered that Nelly had spoke even so, and declared that she would welcome him at Todd's.

"This one's just as big a fool as the other at heart," he thought.

"For my father's sake," added Joanna.

"No doubt it can't be—he's got his knife into me for evermore now," he said aloud.

"There he is!" she exclaimed suddenly, and pointed to the heathery hill above them.

The boy's eyes shone. He gazed at the approaching figure with admiration and enthusiasm.

"How strong and swift he goes!"

"It's easy coming downhill."

"I'll wager he strode up just as strong. Nobody walks like that but the master—as if the ground under his feet belonged to him!"

"So it does," declared Joanna. "At least, he's a large shareholder in the new works."

"A great success they're bound to be then."

Harvey followed Easterbrook with his eyes. There was pure devotion in them, and Joanna saw it.

"Trust him for knowing!" added Porter. "Mr. Fincher says that place up over will knock us into a cocked hat in a year or two. I never saw the master in knickerbockers before—how fine he looks!"

George Easterbrook threaded his way among the white mounds of the works; then he disappeared into a little building below, and the animation died from Harvey's face.

Joanna was moved at what she had seen.

"Oh, Harvey," she said, "can't you look at life like father, and always be straight and honest? I know how hard it is. I've often been tempted to dodge things now and again—just the small temp-

tations that come to a girl; but I thought on father, and I believe I've always been honest."

"You're his daughter. You can't choose but think and do as he does. But I've only known him and seen him for a year or two. I'm not his son. I didn't have a mother like you. My mother went her own way and had her own ideas. I'm not saying a word against her. She was built so and none the worse—only different."

"But you admire father's way, and see how fine it is?"

"Everything about him is fine—too fine for the likes of me."

"Don't say that. Nothing's too fine for you—or anybody. Father's way of looking at life is just as much within your reach as within mine, though I am his own flesh and blood. That's what he'd say, anyway. And his life and experience have proved it."

"Till he ran up against me. Well, I'm being as good as gold now it's too late; and Mr. Crispin and Mr. Fincher would tell him so. But he don't want to hear that. He wouldn't care how good I'd been to them, so long as I'd been bad to him."

"You weren't bad—at least—it's such a muddle—oh, why did you do it?"

"There's no muddle in my mind," he said. "I see it only too bitter clear."

They talked a little longer, and then a man approached and bade Harvey go to his work.

"See me again," he implored.

"I'll see you again this summer, if I can."

"Promise it. If you promise, you will."

"I promise, then."

"Ah," he said, shouldering his spade, "there is something in straightness when it comes to promising. There is something in trusting people and knowing you can. It makes life a sure thing. I'll never lie again, Joanna Easterbrook—if I can help it."

CHAPTER VIII

THE POINT OF VIEW

Now George Easterbrook spoke with Luther Crispin, and first his mind was relieved and next it was shaken. For he heard that the old man knew the truth concerning Porter, and then was startled to find how much Luther's attitude differed from his own.

The accident of being a strong and successful man had placed Easterbrook in a position where he ruled and commanded deference; and he had enjoyed this situation so long that the experience of meeting men who cared nothing for his opinions and who did not mind differing from them, or even laughing at them, had been rare with the master of Brunel's Tower. But Mr. Crispin was a master himself, and his sense of humour opened a window on life which furnished a view that the potter did not possess. George, indeed, at this stage in his experience, felt more affinity with Anthony Fincher (and his doubtful acceptance of things) than with the optimistic bachelor. He told Mr. Crispin the story of Porter's error, and the elder listened patiently. His eye twinkled once or twice, not at the story, but at the gravity of the teller.

"I little like to go over all this again, and you mustn't think I'm at the trouble to explain these things from unfriendliness to the boy," concluded Easterbrook. "I'm far from unfriendly to him now. I was more interested in him than in any young man I've seen in my life—just no doubt for the reason that he's different from any other that I've had through my hands. I wish him well, whatever I may fear for him; and I tell you his story at Brunel's Tower for your own good, not for his hurt. Aye—and for his own good, too. It will be a great weight off my mind to know that you've heard exactly the same story from him; but I can hardly hope it."

Mr. Crispin twinkled again, put his head on one side, and regarded the other.

"I can't say that I've heard exactly the same story from Harvey," he answered.

"I feared it."

"But then no two people do tell the same story quite the same way. If they tell it in the same words even, it won't be the same story; because it filters through two different minds, and minds colour words, like clay colours water. Minds colour the purest words, George, like clay colours the purest water. However, I doubt not you've told me truth as it looks to you."

Easterbrook started.

"Thank you for nothing," he said drily. "The truth goes without saying from me, I believe."

"Truth's all colours of the rainbow, George," answered the elder. "Young Porter told me the truth, too—from his point of view. I'm quite sure of that."

"His point of view's likely to be twisted, I fear."

"If it was, you twisted it. You must link up this thing with other things, and not put it all by itself, as you have. A fact will often look very black indeed, or very bright indeed, until you set it in its proper place in a row of other facts; and then you'll find they throw their own light upon it; or their own shadows; and you'll get the colour of truth on your fact; but not while it stands alone. And even then, 'tis only the point of view that decides how the thing looks. Now you're a man that have such a terrible steadfast and direct vision, George, and see things so exceeding clear, that you can't imagine any other point of view than your own is worth talking about. You were born with a pair of eyes that had the power to pierce between good and evil and separate 'em, no matter how close they might be tangled."

"Reason separates them, if you keep your sense of justice in good working order."

"Our sense of justice is a very faulty machine at best, because we can't read another's motives and don't take into consideration the way that all motives are mixed. Them that crucified Christ did it from mixed motives—some clean and some foul—and you cast out Porter from mixed motives; but Christ died from pure motives; and Porter—faulty, mistaken and ignorant young chap though he was—did what he did from pure motives. I do honestly believe that, after hearing him. So you've got to link up a bit, as I say, and cast the light of his motives on the business as well as the light of your burning sense of jus-

tice. If the light of your justice kills the light of his motive, then your justice is doing great injustice. And more than his motives there is to this: there's his outlook and his general view of life—got God knows where—from an easy mother, perhaps; or a doubtful father. Mrs. Fincher says his father was well born, and I reckon she's right, for it looks very likely. Perhaps his father came from the ruling classes and he got his neat head and wrists and ankles and scandalous ideas from a gentleman. All this you don't take into account. But we'll be content with his motive."

"Can pure oil breed a foul light?" asked the other. "Can a good motive condone a very evil deed?"

"I don't know what you think; I know what I do," answered Luther Crispin. "The ridiculous, wrong-headed chap set you on a sort of heavenly throne—higher far than was wise or right. He made you his god, and he's got a sense of gratitude for goods received that amounts to a disease. Between man and man, I mean. It's quite proper between man and God. Never did I see anybody so quick to value kindness as him, and so slow to forget it. He'd have made a very fine Christian if his mind had been built on a different pattern. He may even yet, now he's left you. The only thing that holds him back I reckon is the knowledge you ain't a Christian. And coupled to that fine feeling in him is the hunger to do good for good. He got it into his wicked head that to find out Todd's secret for you would be some return for his salvation, which he owed to you. He was out to fight the world for you. You were his cap-

tain, and since all's fair in war—at any rate, to his order of mind—what the deuce did it matter to him how the world smarted so long as Brunel's Tower was the gainer? Old Wilberforce and his girl, my godchild, and their good—why, they were the enemy! He wasn't up against them for himself, but had to fight and conquer them for you. And when the enemy, in the shape of poor Nelly—— But there, surely such a man as you can see all sides and look at this business from Harvey Porter's side for once? For my part, far too prone as I am to suck fun out of human nature and its little sillinesses—my own as well as another man's—for me, I do assure you, this flare-up has a comical side. And to see that young devil doing outrageous deeds to win the praise of his god; and then, for all the trouble, only putting his god into a proper tearing rage—don't you see how cruel funny it looks from another point of view again? He wanted, above all else in the world, to pleasure you; and what did he do? He put you out of temper and made you rage and roar—for the first time in your life, I expect. He, who would pretty well have died for you, went and did what your bitterest enemy couldn't have done, and made you forget yourself! You wouldn't even hear him; you thrust him out unheard—you, the very image of patience and justice! Ain't that comical?"

But the other saw nothing humorous in this spectacle.

"You find fun in queer places," he said. "What you say is true—too true—for I did rage, and I was fairly off my balance for two hours—but what

is there funny in a man of my years and experience going down and spoiling his life's record before a wicked boy?"

"You'll never know," answered Luther. "For the same reason the man running down the street after his top-hat in a gale of wind never can see where the joke lies. And, just for the same reason, Porter will never know how awful bad he's been, because his point of view can't focus it. But he didn't actually offer to marry the girl, so he says; and I believe it, because he'd gone quite far enough with her that day; and when she bubbled over, as women will, and got above herself and jumped down his throat and told him Todd's secret, he was actually sorry that she had. He swore that, and I can well believe it. There's no doubt you ought to have heard his story, George, for though a proper shameful bit of history, it isn't so shameful as you thought, or as it looks, stripped naked and standing all by itself."

"It shows a hopeless crookedness of mind."

"Of course it does. I don't deny that—except the hopelessness. Human nature's never hopeless, and Wilberforce Todd would be the first to tell you so. Perhaps he has. Anyhow, I warrant he's forgiven Porter. He's got a twinkle in his mind—old Wilberforce—that throws the light on things you never can see."

"And don't want to see, if by that you mean the misty vision that fails to separate right from wrong."

"I've never heard the love of fun called that before," answered Mr. Crispin; "but I dare say, from your point of view, that's the way to call it.

Christ had it, at any rate; and if we'd got a few more of His gentle jokes handed down, He'd seem the more human to us. But the twelve were like you—took themselves a thought too seriously perhaps and missed the Lord's playfulness before poor little humanity. He's the only one of the Trinity with a spark of fun, come to think of it. And why? Because He was the Divine Son of a human mother—because humanity's blood was in His holy veins; because He saw there was a comic side as well as a tragic one to men and women. He smiled through His tears; and I wish you could. Remember the natural faultiness of our nature, at any rate, if you can't see the fun of it. For you, and only for you he did it; and such gratitude, in a young ignorant thing, suffering from handicaps we know not of, is a sign of grace."

"Didn't I always feel that and value it in him?"

"I'm sure you did, George; you couldn't help it. But go on feeling it; and don't let this storm blind you and spoil your eyesight. Another interesting thing: he's never spoken a hard word against you."

"Against me! Why should he?"

"Why not? From his point of view there was plenty of reason. Many might. We hear of the ingratitude of children to their parents, never of the ingratitude of parents to their children. Yet I've seen it. He's not your child; but no child you might have got would ever have felt as grateful to you as this chap; and so when you threw him out, and didn't even listen to his point of view, he felt it unjust and let his rage take shape.

But it died out of him very quick. D'you know why?"

"You whitewash the young blackguard to your own satisfaction, Crispin, but not to mine."

"I don't want to whitewash him, my dear. I only want to see the real colour of him and help you to see it. I've never yet met a man or woman who was all white, or all black. But my question: D'you know why he cooled down quicker than you and went on with his life again easier than you did?"

"Because he's got no conscience."

"He hasn't got much, though it's growing in him steady. But that's not the reason. He won back self-control, just because he could do what you couldn't. He looked at this from your point of view—single-handed he came to it—or helped by the watching Lord, I should say—and he saw himself just as you saw him, and was properly cast down. Of course, from your point of view, there was no room to blame you, or cuss you. And so, with a very fine sense of reason in such an untrained boy, he accepted his great loss and saw you had to do as you did. And now he thinks the same of you as ever he did, and when he left the message: that he would serve you still if it was in his power, he wasn't insulting you; he was only trying to show you how contrite he felt. In fact, he's let you down fairly light, George."

The other did not answer, and Mr. Crispin spoke again.

"Isn't it something that he can feel so? Isn't it something that his lesson is bearing fruit? But you can't forget the fruit it bore for you, I sup-

pose, and the bitter taste is on your tongue still. See him for five minutes. Belike it would take that bitter taste from your mouth if you'd bring yourself to do it."

But Easterbrook shook his head.

"No good can come of that. I won't see him. I never wish to see him again. I've forgiven him—you can tell him so—freely and completely. I hope he'll justify his existence and do well and worthily here, to make up for the past. But don't relax discipline and don't do what you advise me and be too willing to think everybody's point of view is righter than your own, Crispin. That's a dangerous opinion for a master."

"Better hear all sides and reserve judgment, than judge from one side only, and that your own, George. You shall be told how he goes on. He's a very understanding young man, with a great power of making you want to talk to him."

"I know that. If his heart was as quick as his head—— Now we must be going."

"Remember—remember——" said old Crispin, taking the hand that Easterbrook extended. "Remember that all good gifts come from the good place, George. And the heart that was big enough to hold his fierce gratitude to you, the heart that was big enough to dare what he dared—however, I've preached enough. I'm on his side, you see—he's won me. In fact, I like the wretch something tremendous; but he won't be here long, I reckon. He's good for better things than we can offer him here. I hope to advance him when the chance comes."

Joana entered, and presently she and her

father went off together. Concealed from him, Harvey Porter watched George Easterbrook walk down the valley. For a time the master spoke of Harford Moor and the increasing promise revealed there; but Joanna was full of another matter more interesting to her. She came out with it quickly and spoke of the meeting between her and Harvey Porter.

"He said that he's being as good as gold—now it's too late; and he said that he'd never lie again—if he could help it. And he said there was nobody like you in the world. He was glad to see me and—he sadly longed to be back at the works—ours. He asked after poor old Tom, and was sorry he was dead. And he was very pleased that Marsland's Alice had thrown him over—for her own sake."

"How was he looking?"

"Very thin, but very hard and strong. He fairly hates the Moor."

Mr. Easterbrook listened quietly to Joanna a little longer, and then he changed the subject.

During the days that followed it seemed to his daughter and his partner that he was more at peace. But he did not mention Mr. Crispin or Harvey Porter again to Joanna, though he detailed his conversation with old Luther to Paul Pitts.

"Crispin would suit you better than he does me," declared the master. "There's a danger in such an easy outlook on life and such readiness to make excuse for what cannot be excused; but he did me good for all that, and I confess to it. He sees a lot of fun where there isn't any; but he

mixes a good bit of sense with his nonsense and looks all round a thing. There's great wisdom in that, and I don't look all round things enough. I've always reckoned that to look all round a thing weakens your own power of action; for you see in the world the clever philosophic men hold off saying 'yes' or 'no' with a caution that looks like cowardice to me. In fact, they've got such big minds that they can't make them up. And so they stand still and talk wisdom and do nought, while the smaller-minded men of action pay no heed to them but go on their own way and rule the world. All the same, it's the far outlook that helps to justice and makes one hold the balance truer."

"For certain, only the large-minded man is the fair-minded man. And we're all learners to the last minute, whether we think so or not," answered Mr. Pitts. "But you were always one with a good appetite for learning, George."

CHAPTER IX

AT THE WORKS

BILLY GODBEER, the son of the turner, ground copper in a stone mortar, then winnowed it through a fine lawn. The copper came in all shapes to Brunel's Tower. Old kettles or rivets, or any scraps or shavings of the metal answered the purpose here. The pieces were put into a saggar of fire-clay, and then subjected to the greatest heat of the kilns. They melted, cooled again, and reappeared presently in a rotten crust. This was pulverized until it became a purple dust. Then, with addition of red and white lead, of china stone and ground flint, it produced the famous green glaze of the pottery, a colour lustrous and rich and unmatched on West-Country ware.

George Easterbrook was making a tour of the works, an operation he performed at unexpected intervals, and now he approached Billy and handled the heavy copper-dust.

A season of unusual prosperity had been recorded, and to Easterbrook's eyes the shelves of the store-houses looked very empty. Orders were pouring in, and overtime ran ceaselessly to cope with them. There had been a great call for the ware, and some new patterns were in brisk demand. Joanna invented the picture of a boat with a brown sail, floating on a blue sea. This design

proved successful beyond expectation; and Mr. Pitts, during a lighter moment, had made a little dish, or ash-tray, in the shape of a flat fish. Upon it were written the words, “A pla(i)ce for everything,” and this joke so pleased the public that the fish was wanted quicker than it could be made. A purple thistle for Scotch firms also occupied the new flower-painter, who had succeeded Miss Medway. He was a middle-aged man from the North, and proved very skilful. As for Mr. Easterbrook’s own pots, the supply had been exhausted for a month. He had been idle of late on Sundays and ill-disposed to work. But he intended to return to the string-wheel ere long, and make up for lost time. Mr. Pitts protested, and was decorating Adam Zachary’s vases with his dragons.

The master roamed on, and spent ten minutes with a new “handler.” The handlers and pressers worked under the roof in rooms finely lighted from above. He felt the clay and considered it a little too moist. In the same place Christopher Ede painted with an aerograph. The liquid slip filled a vaporizer and was sprayed therefrom upon the clay. Thus graduated stains were got, and one colour blended with another. Easterbrook watched Christopher for a few moments and approved his operations. Then to the moulds he went, where Davy Luke was making the new fish trays as fast as he could manage it. Mr. Pitts had wrought the plaster-of-Paris moulds himself, and now young Luke was emptying them.

The master gave him a few hints and passed on, again looking with dissatisfaction at the emptiness of the warehouses; but below in the packing-

room was as much pottery as four men could handle. A load of hay had just arrived and half-filled the building into which, two months before, Porter had locked Mr. Punchard. Now the sun streamed in from above and the fragrance of the hay made the great chamber sweet. A white terrier with a black face was sleeping in the hay, but he awoke at the sound of Easterbrook's voice and came forward to salute him. He belonged to Timothy Coysh, who worked close at hand with the teapot-spouts.

Timothy stood high in Easterbrook's esteem, and he often spoke with him. He did so now.

"You'll be wanting half another load of hay, Timothy," he said.

"That's certain," replied Mr. Coysh; "and half a hundred more boxes and cases by the look of it."

"How's the clay from the cemetery?" asked Easterbrook, and the other said the sample could not be bettered.

"There was just a scrap of wood here and there, so Tolley told me, that turned to fine dust at the touch," said Timothy Coysh. "That would be scraps of coffin over a hundred years old and a pinch of human dust also."

"Why not? Earth is earth, and Nature always uses everything again and again."

"She does," admitted Mr. Coysh. "She's got a use for everything—only human creatures waste. And because a bit of earth was once a man, there's no good reason why it should never be used for anything else."

The other nodded.

"Mr. Pitts was talking of it last night; for he found the cemetery clay a very fine, soft thing mixed with our older bed. He reads Shakespeare, and got an idea from it. In fact, he made a rhyme just suited to a pot of cemetery earth."

He remembered the verse.

"It went thus:

"Imperial Caesar's self, at Time's degree,
May help to make an old wife's pot of tea.' ''

"And no harm done, neither, whether he's in the tea or the pot," asserted Mr. Coysh. "I'm sure there have been men in the world who would have been a darned sight more reposeful and dignified in the shape of a teapot than in their own—aye, and a darned sight more useful, too. For my part, given a decent interval in the earth, and of course after all they that respected me and knew me in the flesh had passed away, I shouldn't mind taking my place in the teapot-spouts instead of over them."

"No more should I," answered Easterbrook. "Be sure that stuff that is built into us, for the minute, Timothy, was put to all manner of uses, before it came to be our turn for it; and to all manner of uses will it be put again when our light's out."

"I hope it's in keeping with the Wesleyans—that's all," answered Mr. Coysh, "being one from my youth up."

Then the master smiled and left him.

At this season of the year, when the weather allowed of it, much drying was done in the open air, and Easterbrook now passed through the

foreyard, where many hundreds of pots stood on the six-foot boards under the fir-trees and round about. He saw a batch of "Ann Hathaway's Cottage" fresh from their painting at the hands of Joanna. For a moment he regarded them, then turned and ascended to the throwing-room. Hither came the thud and thunder of Mr. Tolley's engine, and the endless straps flashed up from beneath. Zachary laboured at the string-wheel, and two young men were at the steam-wheels. One was making egg-cups, and Easterbrook watched him without speaking. The young man had great natural talent, and promised to be a fine but not a great potter. His work was beautifully finished and his touch delicate and clean; but his remarkable dexterity was not accompanied by inspiration. Godbeer was turning large vases on a chock. The clay curled away in dull red ribbons as usual, and his profiles purred on the faces of the pots.

"Your boy, Billy, is making a very clever job of it at the copper, William," said Easterbrook. "I think we've found what he can do best for the minute."

He visited the cooling-room, which was dimly lighted and empty save for the pots. They stood on the shelves in silent rows—newly created things from the wheel, waiting for finished form, for colour, and for fire. George looked to see if any of his own pots might still be here, but he knew, even as he did so, that all were gone.

He met a great party of holiday folk being taken round the works. Rupert Marsland was their guide—work that he enjoyed and did well.

The visitors came from the North, and Easterbrook liked to hear the burr on their tongues.

In the show-room—a lofty apartment thronged with finished ware from floor to ceiling—he found an old woman sitting, fanning herself. She was quite overcome by the heat, and sat there while the rest of the party followed Marsland from shop to shop.

"I'm looking at all them teapots, mister, and thinking there ain't a drop of tea in one of 'em!" she said.

"D'you want a cup?"

"Properly, I assure you."

"You shall have it," answered Easterbrook.

"Can it be done?" she asked; and he nodded. "If a cup of water's blessed, then a cup of tea is twice blessed," she declared. "No sugar, and as strong as your steam-engine, mister."

He laughed, and went to his office. In ten minutes a boy brought the visitor a cup of tea and some biscuits.

"Who's the gent with the grey beard and straight eyes?" she asked.

"The master."

"I know that much without your naming it. What's he called?"

"Mr. Easterbrook."

"Well, you tell him I'm going to buy two of them fat vawses with the ship on 'em, before I go out of this."

"I will, ma'am."

Meantime, Easterbrook was with the painter of the ships and watching Joanna at work. He liked the things but little, yet knew that Joanna's taste

stood for the taste of the multitude, and that what pleased her would please many. He suggested a modification in the colour of the ship.

"If it came a shade more red, I think it might be better," he said; "and don't paint them on the three-handled vases any more. They're ill suited to the shape. In fact, I like nothing on the three-handled things. They're decorative enough as they stand, and only want the coloured glaze."

In the studio of Mr. Pitts he found Paul making a new model. It was based on an old Staffordshire tyg with many handles. He had of late been studying the ancient pottery models—dishes and piggins, cradles and jugs in shape of owl or bear.

"I've got an idea for a surprise cider tyg, with a mouse at the bottom," said Mr. Pitts. "You won't give me any big pots, so I must set to work myself."

"Hast thought about Aunt Sophia's grave-piece yet?" he asked, and Paul replied that he had.

"I've settled on a cross, with a single wood-dove sitting on the arm of it," he answered. "That's my idea; but Joanna wants the statue of Grief again. What say you?"

"I'm for the statue," answered George. "She thought a lot of it, and it's your greatest original work, I suppose."

"It shall be done, then—not from the moulds. I'll model it anew and larger."

Easterbrook mused a moment; then uttered a thought.

"I wonder if Wilberforce Todd would mind for

once in a way our using a bit of his stuff? Seeing the purpose——”

“No need to wonder. I'd thought of it myself, but shouldn't have mentioned it if you had not. He'll be very well pleased to send me a bit of the clay if I ask him.”

“Do so,” said Easterbrook. “We cannot trust ours to that size.”

“We cannot.”

“He understands us.”

“He ought to.”

Mr. Pitts showed the other some drawings, and they were considering the new tyg model when a bell began to ring, and announced the dinner-hour.

They parted then, for Joanna came with her luncheon-basket to the studio, and George Easterbrook left the works to keep an appointment.

Without, in the sun, a score of men and boys were making their meal, for at this season Mr. Punchard's furnaces did not offer the invitation of winter. Rows and rows of six-foot boards on barrels supported the drying crockery, while a sharp watch was kept on the sky, for a shower of rain might have done grave damage in a moment.

But there was no sign of rain.

Talk ran upon pottery, politics, and the latest events. The subject of Porter still commanded attention, but a later sensation shared it: Rupert Marsland's betrothed had run away and been married secretly to another man.

The time was come when his acquaintance felt it possible openly to mention the incident to the painter; and his attitude had surprised them.

“I made the girl,” said Rupert to Mr. Godbeer

and Mr. Tolley. "I made her. I suppose nobody can deny that—not even her. I took her out of the middle of the road, so to speak, where she used to dance to piano-organs, or play with a skipping-rope—just a daughter of the people, as the saying is. And then, after years of me—after being always at her steadily, week in week out, to enlarge her mind and put on the polish of education, she sinks to this."

"She's a hard case without a doubt," declared Jeremiah Tolley, "and no loss. You'll get to feel presently she's no loss, Marsland."

"I've got to feel that already," he answered. "Looked at in a tolerable haughty spirit, it's more like a mark of the watching ways of Providence."

"She's insulted you something shocking, Rupert," declared Punchard, who did not pretend to any funereal emotions before the tribulation of other people. Indeed, he rather enjoyed Marsland's discomfiture.

"No," answered the other, "she hasn't insulted me, Samuel, for the simple reason that a worm can't insult a superior order of being. She may have thought she was insulting me; but she might as soon have tried to insult the King of England. I go my way unmoved, and she goes hers—back to the laundry! You'll hardly believe it's in human nature after being lifted away from it as she was; but the laundry was in her heart, despite her frantic efforts to go one better with my help. The laundry called and she answered, feeling that there was the only place she could ever hope to shine in. It's a great lesson to you men."

"What is?" asked Christopher Ede.

"The fact that Miss Appleby—or I should say Mrs. Johns, as she is now—threw me over behind my back and married a man that drives one of the laundry carts. And not only that, but she has gone back into the laundry herself also. And I say it's a lesson for you men not to look beneath you for your future wives. Not that that girl will ever be like the others again. I've raised her to a pitch beyond that, and nothing but a right down, low nature could have made her take up with a laundry carman. But there it is—she's done it. And she hadn't the common courage to tell me what she was after, but actually took Johns on the sly and never wrote to me till the day after the wedding! And that also shows pretty well what he is."

"How did you act when first you heard of it, Rupert?" inquired Mr. Godbeer.

"I lay you let fly and cussed the world to blazes," suggested Tolley.

"Oh, no; nothing of that—far from it. I felt more contempt than rage. In fact, you can have even a fine armful, like that woman, too dear. So I just tore the letter in half, and spat on each piece, and properly ground it under my heel! And then a sort of tragical frenzy got hold of me, like you see play-actors on the stage, and I laughed. 'Twas a sound that frightened even myself, and very unlike the way you laugh at anything funny. And then I thought upon all I'd done for her, and all I'd spent in that quarter, and I tried to picture the sort of mind that could throw me over on the quiet and take a laundry carman. Of course, I couldn't; and then I said

to myself, 'Instead of making a noise and getting yourself in a state, Rupe, you thank your God it's happened, for what's the matter is just this and no more: you've tried to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear—and you've failed, like a good many other clever people have failed before you.' ”

“There was a sort of comfort in that, no doubt,” said William Godbeer.

“It was the proper philosophical line to take,” declared Rupert, “and for that matter I went further. I’ve got a memory rather out of the common, I believe; anyway, it answers to any demands I put on it; and now I set to work to remember all the unpleasant and unpromising things in Mrs. Johns’s character; and when I gave my mind seriously to it, I was fairly struck to find what a rare lot of nasty faults I’d overlooked and winked at. I wouldn’t say she was vulgar or anything of that, else she would never have won my attention; but looking back with the scales fallen off my eyes—or rather took off by her—I saw only too plain what a dark side there was to her. Her language was generally held in check—at any rate, before me; but when she got excited, she’d let herself go and use terrible common expressions, and fairly tread grammar under her feet, you might say. I was putting all that right, however; but I couldn’t put right the mind that put a laundry carman before me. That was beyond human power.”

“What did she say in her letter, chucking you, if I may ask?” inquired Mr. Tolley. “But of course if it’s too private I shouldn’t expect you to answer.”

"There's no doubt somebody helped her, for it was far above her usual powers of expression. She might have got it out of a book, and in my opinion she very likely did," answered Rupert, "because she was very much given to story reading, though against my wish; and in the novels what they write it's an everyday thing for a girl to change her mind in this way and say to her lover just what Mrs. Johns said to me. So I reckon from the language she lifted it. She just said that I was far too good for her, and that she'd come to see she could never rise to my intellects, and that she would never be a complete and proper partner for a man like me. Of course, it was all true enough, and nobody saw it quicker than me, when I could look at the thing in cold blood after a night's rest; but the point was that she'd never let on like that before, and never thought she wasn't quite equal to my intellects and all the rest of it till she met Johns. That's where the sting was—to think she could go straight to him from me!"

"He'd make two of you—she likes 'em large," suggested Christopher Ede.

"Large and empty both," answered Mr. Marsland. "Thanks to me, her knowledge and cleverness is enough to make its mark now, and though she knew she must always play second fiddle in my home, no doubt she found that, beside Johns, she would shine like a lighthouse to a farthing dip."

"No doubt it lies in that," agreed Tolley. "There's a lot like that. She'd rather reign over a fool than serve a clever man."

"A doubtful ambition, however," argued Mr. Godbeer, "for look at it: the fool gives you thrice the work and anxiety that the clever man does."

"They don't mind that," declared Marsland. "So long as they're top dog, some women don't mind the anxiety and work. They'd sooner be bothered that way, and work their wits and their fingers all the time, than sit down and see their husbands' cleverness putting theirs in the shade."

"And there's other sorts of anxiety with a clever man likewise," continued Mr. Punchard. "And I speak what I know, for I've seen it. Most women would far rather have a simple chap, though they might be anxious where the next meal was coming from, than be wedded to a clever man they couldn't count upon. The worry of being hungry is nought to a woman, compared with the worry of not knowing what her husband's up to. The unknown is death to them—and worse. In fact, they can face death easier than doubt. 'Tis the everyday fool makes a woman happy and contented; and when she knows the whip's in her hand, a nice woman never wants to use it. 'Tis enough that it is there and nowhere else. But if the man's clever and shifty both, then, if she's proud, her lot is gall and her bread's soaked in tears. And for my part, well knowing what the woman sex is, I've always pretended to be a greater fool than I am for my wife's comfort and self-respect; which I say, being among friends, of course. It often pays to let a woman think you are half-baked—though madness to let a man think so."

"I'd never stoop to hoodwink a female," de-

clared Mr. Marsland. "I'll be myself before them, and go on my way, and neither turn to the right or left. 'You can take me or leave me,' I remarked to Mrs. Johns, when I offered for her."

"And she did first one and then t'other," said Christopher.

"It haven't shook you, and that's something," ventured Teddy Palk, the under-fireman.

"No, and twenty such women wouldn't shake you, would they, Rupert?" inquired Mr. Tolley. "You'll get another and a better, with finer ideas, who'll know her luck."

"I may or I may not, Jeremiah. But there's no hurry in my mind, I assure you."

"A burnt dog dreads the fire," said Samuel Punchard.

"I wasn't burnt, and I don't dread any woman that walks," answered Rupert; "but one thing I do dread, and I've had my lesson, and thank God I've escaped by the skin of my teeth, in a manner of speaking. And that's to marry out of my class. Go above it a man can without disgracing himself; but go under it he can't; and I'd rather keep single till my last breath than look beneath me again. Playthings they may be; but partners—no."

"The man that only takes 'em to play with, loses the game most times," asserted Godbeer.

CHAPTER X

IN PILES WOOD

As a return for his lessons, John and Wilfred Fincher instructed Harvey in the lore of the Moor, and were glad to tell him all they knew concerning it. Erme Valley was rich in evidence of neolithic man's activities, and though John and Wilfred knew nothing about neolithic man, they were familiar with the hut-circles and alignments, and indicated them to Harvey as matters of interest. They did not interest him, however. Better he liked Piles Wood, a grove of most venerable trees that thronged the eastern bank of Erme a mile above the clay-pit. Hither Harvey would repair, and though the Finchers had shown him the place, he never asked them to accompany him to it again. For it became a sort of sanctuary to Porter: he took his thoughts there and began to believe Piles Wood the only place in which he could think. But he was not always thinking. John Fincher had taught him to fish with a worm for trout, and this experience served to while away his Saturday half-holiday on many occasions. The lonely moors —their immensities and silences—chimed with his lonely heart at this season, and exercised an influence upon him. He did not love them, and longed for the time when his fortunes might lead him away from them again; but he felt the

cathartic principle of the place, and knew that it was salutary for health and spirits—a bracing, stern region with no nonsense about it. The trees in Piles Wood were dwarf, intimate things, and he felt as though he knew some of them personally. Their shoulders, draped in moss and fern, stood sometimes little higher than his own. There were comfortable, secret resting-places and sunny stones among them. The knowledge of these he shared with the fox and the serpent. And for music, Erme purred at hand, or high above, on Harford Moor, the kine bellowed, and the sheep-bell uttered a muffled jangle.

There came a morning when Luther Crispin told Harvey that he might have a whole holiday; and Harvey knew why; but Mr. Crispin did not know that he knew. Nelly Todd and her grandfather were to spend the day at Harford and visit Erme Clay-Pit—a fact that had reached Harvey in a letter from Joanna. For she felt under no compulsion not to tell him, and he was glad to know. Indeed, her letter told him more than Mr. Crispin himself could have reported; for Joanna hinted of a third visitor—one as yet unknown even by repute beside Erme.

Therefore Harvey, taking John Fincher's rod and a tin tobacco-box full of worms, went up the river. His lunch was in his pocket, with a newspaper two days old. For of late he had woken to an interest in the larger world, unshared by those about him.

He went his way soon after dawn, considered the weather, which was doubtful, and presently, while yet the dew was on the herbage and the

cloudy sun low in the east, began his fishing. His skill was not great, but he had fair fortune, and in an hour had killed five small trout. He caught three more, then took his breakfast of bread-and-butter, and a drink from the river. The rest of his food he hid in Piles Wood, designing to return there about noon.

Then he wandered through the lonely valleys intent on his sport, and presently, wearying of it after a fruitless hour, sat down to rest and to wonder about the visitors. Mr. Todd did not occupy his thoughts; but they were much concerned with Nelly and the young man who accompanied her. He did not wish to see them, yet would not have avoided them. The thought of them filled his mind, and he pictured them arriving and proceeding to Erme Clay-Pit. Would Nelly take her companion to see the things she had showed him, or would she break fresh ground and avoid those scenes? Perhaps she would not remember them. Would any of her party ask after him? And if they did not, would Mr. Fincher or Mr. Crispin mention him? If they finished the day with tea at Mrs. Fincher's, Amy Fincher would most surely speak of him, for she was his first friend at Harford, and refused to hear any unfavourable criticisms.

Porter turned back presently, and was excited to renew his efforts by the capture of a half-pound trout. He had never performed such a feat before, and it made him very keen. He worked industriously down to Piles Wood again, and the sun, in doubt till now, burst forth brilliantly after noon, set the air quivering over the leagues of the

Moor, and drove the cattle up on to the heights. They stood like graven beasts on lofty points outlined against the sky. Beneath, at water's edge, the heat grew intense, and the flies began to torment the fisherman. He wound up his line, therefore, and sought the wood, where he had left his food and an old creel. Now, in a shady nook, with the lady-fern about him, and alone save for long-legged spiders that ran over his legs, and little flies that hung like golden beads in the sunlight overhead, he sat under the whisper of the oak-trees. To the south, a mile lower down the valley, he could see the blaze of the clay hillocks—very white under the summer sun. He ate up his food, went to the river for a drink, returned to his lair, and smoked a pipe. A pipe was his last accomplishment, and he took great pleasure in it. The pipe finished, he grew drowsy in the extreme heat, and lay with his head in the ferns, and watched the golden flies poised over him, where the sunshine broke through the foliage.

Presently he went very soundly to sleep, and the long-legged spiders explored him unmolested.

Elsewhere Wilberforce Todd, his granddaughter, Nelly, and his fireman, Mr. James Masters, had reached Erme Clay-Pit. The visit thus far resembled another of the past—save that James was his master's guest instead of Harvey Porter. Indeed, to Nelly a strange consciousness of having lived these hours before grew upon her until it became almost unbearable. For Mr. Masters and she were left not a little to their own devices, and after the meal had been taken—they ate it on

Tristis Rock in the old spot—Mr. Todd went off to the works, and James remained with his granddaughter. They went to the river, and roamed here and there; while Mr. Masters protested at the heat and especially lamented it.

"I particularly wanted to keep cool this afternoon," he said. "But given to perspire in the open air as I am, of course with thunder in the air, it's far worse."

"We'll walk slower," she answered. "And perspiration is a very healthy thing. No call to worry about it."

"I'm as healthy, Miss Nelly, as I can be. My stock's all the same. We run up over eighty very often, and think nothing of seventy-five."

"You're tremendously strong, James."

"Yes, I am. And, as I say, I was very wishful to have all my wits about me to-day. In fact, never more so. I'm going to do something to-day that I've never done before, and never shall again. Don't you make any mistake about that: I never shall again."

Her desires made her uncritical. She knew that Mr. Masters proposed to offer marriage, and she thirsted to hear him do so. She had easily exalted him in her mind to a rare personality, and she was fond of him—indeed, more than fond of him—because she felt such faithfulness under the circumstances redounded mightily to the credit of James Masters. He had begun to venture long ago; then came Harvey Porter, and the less brilliant and versatile James was eclipsed. But now, without affront or annoyance, he beamed forth again, and Nelly told herself, and believed, that

such a steadfast spirit was very precious. Though his illumination might prove a thought paler than the blaze of Porter, it would certainly burn with greater steadiness, and atone for heat by the quality of the light. Therefore when James cautiously emerged from the temporary shadow into which he had been thrown, Nelly found herself quite ready to meet him and encourage him. Her surprise was great to find Masters return to the attack at all, and she contrived that she should see his resolution was appreciated.

He grew hotter and hotter, for he had put on his Sunday black, and it proved ill suited to the day or the place. Nelly noticed signs that he was becoming irritable, and set to work to calm him. "Take off your coat. I'll carry it for you," she said. "Next time we have a jaunt—and I hope it will be soon—you must put on light clothes. For that matter, I don't like you in black—never did."

"I'm very proud that you've given my clothes a thought," he answered. "If a woman thinks of a man's clothes, then it's only reason to suppose she thinks of the man in them."

"I suppose you may fairly say that."

"Certainly; and when you advised me to take off my coat, you advised a very clever thing, and I'm going to do it. But I shall carry it, not you. I know my place better than to let you."

"You're quite the gentleman, and always were."

"I wouldn't say that. I am now, along of living so near to you and your grandfather. But I was

a bit rough when I first came to Todd's—in fact, more than rough."

"I never noticed it."

He gave a deep expiration of breath, and mopped his head; then he inserted his handkerchief under his collar, and wiped his neck.

"I can't talk another damned word till we get in a bit of shade," he declared. "The furnaces are a fool to this."

She looked about them.

"There's Piles Woods yonder," she said. "How would it be if we went there? A very cool, private sort of place—you can see it there beside the river."

"Is that a wood?"

"A beautiful little wood. I've been there before to-day."

"Who with?"

"Mary Fincher—picking blackberries."

"Come on, then. Would it be safe to have a drink out of the river?"

"Of course—there's no sweeter water."

"When I say drink, I don't mean to swallow the water," he explained. "When you're piping hot, like I am, it's a very unwise thing to chill the stomach with a lot of cold water. You may do yourself great harm that way. But if you just rinse out the mouth—"

"Do it how you like," she interrupted, "only come on."

They sat beside the stream for a little while, and Mr. Masters exhibited alarm before a dragon-fly. He had never seen one before, and suspected it of being a hornet.

He sighed when Nelly gave him an elementary lesson in natural history.

"How clever you are!" he said. "I'd give ten years off my life to know all you know."

"I'd very soon teach you the little I know, James."

"Come to the wood; then I'll tell you what I've got on my mind."

He looked at the water.

"Blessed if I don't think I'd do it better after I'd had a bathe!"

"If you want to bathe——"

"I don't want to. But you can't throw away a chance at a time like this. I'd go in, clothes and all, if I thought it would help the cause."

"What cause?"

"Come on to the wood."

"If you walk on my right, I might shield you a little with my parasol."

"You shield me! It ought to be the other way about, I should think."

They said no more until they reached the wood. A red fox leapt up before them from a furze brake, and galloped off. Mr. Masters thought it was a dog, and whistled to it.

"It's a fox," said Nelly, "and this is the second time in my life that I've seen one. You can tell them by their brushes—tails, that is."

"What don't you know?" he asked. "The way you reel off the names of natural creatures—birds and beasts, and even flies—it's a fair knock-out."

They entered the shade of Piles Wood, and he donned his coat.

"I'd ask you to sit upon it; but it's my best, and I know you'd rather not."

"I wouldn't sit on your coat for anything, James. Besides, there's no need. The place is so dry as a bone, and the stones are all covered with moss."

They sat down, not ten yards from where Harvey Porter slept dreamlessly. But his rod was beside him in the ferns, and he himself invisible behind a granite boulder.

"I shall always remember Piles Wood," said Mr. Masters. "Whatever happens now, I shall always remember it, Nelly, because this is the day of my life in any case."

"How exciting, James!"

"Blast the flies! I hate the country; 'tis full of beastly things good to nobody."

"Take a bit of fern. What language you're using! I never heard you use a swear word before, and to-day you're full of them."

"Beg pardon, I'm sure. Well, it's no use wasting any more time: I'd better dash for it. In a word—did you notice I called you 'Nelly' just now without saying 'Miss'?"

"Yes, I did."

"There's more in that than meets the eye. It was a feeler, you may say. If you'd started and looked me up and down, or anything like that, or shown me, as you very easily could have if you'd wanted, that I'd gone too far, I should have drawn in and dried up. And you'd have heard no more. But you didn't mind, seemingly?"

"Of course I didn't."

"Then I'll say this, Nelly—dear Nelly, even—

I'll say this—darling Nelly, even—for that's what you are to me—just darling—and there it is—I love you—look at that thing on your knee—surely to God he's a stinger! There! done him—ugly beast. I love you with all my strength. I'm a very virtuous man, and never had no truck with women in all my life. And I believe I could make you a husband you'd value more and more as the time went on. We're not what you might call showy people—either of us—though you more than me. But we're the wearing sort, and we should go from strength to strength. I wouldn't say it was a case of united we stand and divided we fall—I wouldn't go so far as to say that, because that's as much as to say you're nothing without me. And that would be disrespectful and untrue. But I do say that united we might cut a very fine figure, and back each other up, and make a good bit more of a splash in the world than we do now—you at home and me in one room. And if you could do it, I'd take a semi-detached villa at Marychurch to-morrow, and you'd be free to come and go to your grandfather, of course; but you'd have a house of your own also, with its proper name on the gate. In fact, your own home, and there's no dignity like the dignity of your own home. I feel that, somehow, though I can't in honesty say I've ever had one yet. What do you think of it? Don't hedge—just say right out if I've aimed too high. I shan't be the first if I have."

Nelly gave him her hand, and he shook it awkwardly and dropped it. She gave it to him again.

"There," she said. "That's my answer. I

care for you, James—a very great deal I care for you, and I respect you. In fact, I love you."

"For myself—not just because I love you?" he asked.

"Of course."

"Because a one-sided friendship is no use to man or beast; but all the same I'd like to think that when you say you love me, it was just for myself alone, Nelly, and no complications."

"I love you, and nobody but you," she replied. "There's nobody else in my heart but you, James, and never will be."

"You can't say no more than that, I'm sure. And I'm the proudest man that ever came in this wood. 'Tis a great weight off my mind—you can't think how great. And now you see why I cussed and killed the flies, and showed temper. Not a fretful man by nature, however; I'll swear you'll not find me fretful. In fact, as easy as need be."

"I know that well enough. I've always admired your great self-control and modesty."

"Thank God, then," he said. "I'm not a prayerful man by nature, I must tell you, but I could easily get into the way of it, if you set any particular store by it. And if ever I'm to thank God for anything, I'm sure this is the time and place. And so I do thank Him, and I hope you feel the same."

"I do—humbly and gratefully I thank Him."

"That being so, may I kiss you?"

"Of course you may—no need to ask."

"At first I shall ask—it's more respectful and more true to my nature. Don't get excited. There's nothing gained by that, even by lovers.

It's silly. We'll be proper lovers, but we'll always be civil and respectful to each other."

"Of course, James."

"Don't think I'm a cold man—in fact, never was a hotter—a fiery man in mind and body; but so much the more—"

He broke off, for Nelly uttered a sudden, choked sound, started, stared over his shoulder, and turned pale.

"Oh Lord! what is it now—a snake?" he asked.

Then he looked behind him, and saw Harvey Porter staring over a rock at them. He appeared but ten yards distant. His hair stood on end, and his face was half sleepy, half astonished.

Mr. Masters dropped Nelly's hands which he had been holding, and turned upon the other.

"You!" he said. "What on earth are you doing here, you godless rip?"

"I was here before you—asleep behind this stone," said Porter. "I've got a holiday from Erme Clay-Pit, and I'm fishing—at least, I've been fishing. Then I came here for my dinner, and being so hot and fishing no good, I had a bit of a nap. And your voices came into it, and made me dream. And if I'd known you and Miss Todd were walking as far as the wood, I swear I wouldn't have come here."

"Shall I take that for true, or shan't I?" inquired Mr. Masters, turning to his betrothed.

But Porter answered before she could.

"Of course it's true," he said. "What advantage would it be to me to tell anything that was false about it?"

Nelly, still very white, asked him a question.

"If you've learned to tell the truth, so much the better," she said. "And if that's so, perhaps you'll tell it. How much of my talk with Mr. Masters have you heard? Answer that, Harvey Porter."

"Not a word, on my honour," he replied—"that is, not a word till just the end. I dare say your voices woke me, for they turned my mind to dream—not about you, but about something else. Then I came to myself, and there was the noise of Mr. Masters going on, like a bee in a bottle, and I thought I must be dreaming still. And then I found I was awake, and heard him saying there never was a hotter man than him. Then I recognized the voice, and knelt up, and looked over the stone, and you saw me, Miss Todd."

"Come away," she said to James. "I'll thank you to give me your arm away from here."

Mr. Masters only dimly understood the nature of Nelly's past relations with Porter, but he knew enough to believe that Porter had erred and done wrong. Therefore he scowled at Harvey, offered Miss Todd the protection of his arm, and prepared to conduct her out into the sun.

"We don't want nothing to do with you, and least said soonest mended," he declared. "We all know the sort you are."

"You needn't go back to the past," answered the other. "People can make mistakes and misunderstand each other without being enemies for evermore, can't they? I'm sorry for what I did, and I'm very glad to have the chance to say so to Miss Todd. And if she can forgive me, no doubt

she can make you. Not that you've got much to forgive, I should say. In fact, it's all the better for you it happened so."

Nelly was regaining her presence of mind, and this concatenation cheered her. She perceived that nothing better could have happened to round her revenge.

"You poked up at a funny moment," she said; "for if you'd woke up five minutes sooner, you'd have heard James Masters asking me to be his wife, and me saying that I would. In fact, there's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, Mr. Porter."

"Well," he cried, "if that isn't news! Not that I'd have listened to any such thing, I'm sure—not a sacred thing like a man offering marriage. So it was a good job that I stopped asleep, else I might have spoiled all. And if I may do it, I humbly offer my respects and good luck to you both, I'm sure."

"She don't want your congratulations—be certain of that," ventured Mr. Masters. But he was not certain himself, and, in fact, found that he had erred.

"As to that," declared Nelly, "the strong must be merciful to the weak, James; and we needn't turn up our noses at him, though he's only a clay-cutter now."

"I've left that; I'm rising in the works."

"That's your way—up to a point. Not going to be a turner now, I suppose? Come here and let me look at you—me and my husband to be."

Harvey approached.

"If Mr. Masters will cut his stick for ten minutes, I'd like to speak to you, miss."

But Mr. Masters refused.

"You can't possibly have anything to say to my future wife that I can't hear," he declared.

"That's right," answered the other. "I'm not going to say anything to her she isn't at liberty to say to you; but I'm going to say something to her I can't say before you. If you'll use your brains, I'm sure you'll see that's how it is. Two minutes will do it. And understand I came here today to avoid you, Miss Todd, not to seek you. But things happen."

"Well you might avoid me," she said; then turned to James.

"He's right, so you go along for five minutes. I'll tell you after."

Mr. Masters went out of earshot, but remained in evidence. He sat on a stone by the river, looked at his watch repeatedly, and before the end of five minutes began to return at Porter's call. He was suspicious, and had grown warm again. He assumed a proprietorial manner.

But there was no cause for annoyance. Harvey had frankly and humbly apologised while James reclined by Erme. He explained that he had not dreamed of marriage, but only hoped for friendship. With regard to the secret, he told Nelly that he had wanted it, and really meant to win it from her in time. He admitted that he had been exceedingly wicked and treacherous and base, but declared that the disaster that had overtaken him was the turning-point—a providence in disguise.

"Once you forgive me, everybody else will; and it's up to you to forgive me, I'm sure, miss, for think how happy you will be with that fine man for a husband. Any girl might thank her stars for such a man as that to fall in love with her. Handsome and clever both. And you can't think that such good fortune has fallen to you and still feel harsh against a poor chap like me."

"I forgive you, then," she said.

"For everything?"

"Yes, for everything."

"That's properly sporting, and you shan't regret it."

He raised his voice and summoned James.

"She's forgiven me, Mr. Masters! I've been very much mistaken, you must know, and done things that I'd better not have done. It's a pity, but so it was; and Miss Todd knew of them. However, she's forgiven them, being in such rare good luck herself to-day."

He left them and went to his fishing-rod and creel. He did not return to the subject, but chatted on other matters connected with the immediate present and walked back beside them to Erme Clay-Pit.

Before they reached it, Nelly had laughed and permitted him to show her how he angled for trout. She even tried herself and accepted as a gift the fish that he had caught.

Mr. Masters looked on with mingled emotions, but did not relax his proprietorial manner for a moment. He was a good deal annoyed at this meeting, because, while no jealousy existed in his

mind, he felt the incident unfair and almost indecent falling upon that great hour.

"If I ain't to be the centre of the stage to-day, I should like to know when I am to be," he thought. His uneasiness became manifest, and Nelly, perceiving it, bade Harvey depart.

"Mr. Crispin will be very glad to know you've forgiven me," declared Porter. "In fact, quite as glad as I am myself. And I hope you'll make Mr. Todd do the like."

"He's forgiven you ages ago," she answered. "You know what he is. He made excuses for you."

"I hope he'll live to be rewarded by me," said Harvey. "Mind you, give him one or two of those fish for his supper to-night; and my respects—my respects, if you please."

Then he bade them good-bye, and they proceeded into the works, while he returned the way that he had come and went up-stream.

CHAPTER XI

HOPE

MR. EASTERBOOK sometimes played a game of piquette with Joanna after he had supped, but it was a long time since he had done so.

To-night, however, he nodded when she asked, and Joanna brought the cards gladly. George lit his pipe, and the game began. But the girl soon perceived that her father's thoughts were elsewhere. He played listlessly and won no pleasure from it.

Then came Paul Pitts. He had his own little sitting-room in the house, and often spent his evenings there with a book; but he usually joined Easterbrook and his daughter for a while before retiring. He sat down now for a moment beside Joanna and watched the play.

But suddenly the master stopped, neglected his cards, and turned to Paul.

"I've been trying to understand your argument over that chap."

"What chap?"

"Porter. You remember—two nights ago. It puzzled me a lot, because for the life of me I couldn't see what you were driving at. And I can't yet."

"I'd forgot all about it," answered Paul. "It's

a thing of some account, however, and I'd dearly like to put my view before you, if it could be done."

"You know what I think of your views on all subjects," answered his partner; "only in this case—owing to some stupidity on my part, no doubt—I don't follow you. I can't deny I'm not satisfied about it—else I shouldn't labour under a very restless state of mind, foreign to my nature. But such arguments as have been brought to bear by Crispin a month ago, and by you two nights since—they don't get me any forwarder. You implied that in justice I was responsible for the boy's future. Now that's idle talk to my ear and you can't mean it."

"You put it wrong, George, for it wasn't what I said. Now listen to me again and hear how I look at it. You needn't be convinced; but at least you can understand and weigh it. What you've done is this: you've created a boy. Though you never got a son, yet thus it stands: you've created a boy and moulded him afresh. Here's a lad by the name of Lee Hockin, and he runs away from a reformatory and comes to you. And you take him, like you'd take any other bit of clay, and mould him on your wheel. You might have sent him back where he came from, but you didn't: you set to work to turn him into a new creation."

"Set to work and failed."

"That's what I'll never grant. You succeeded, I tell you. The old stuff, that was warped and crooked, you were grinding afresh; and he was helping you himself, so far as he could, owing to his great feeling for you and his hungry desire to

please you. And if a bit of the crooked stuff still remained, it was natural. It takes longer to build a character than a pot. But in doing what you did, you weren't true to your own creed—your creed, that the surroundings make the man. You knew what there was to fight, and you knew such deep-rooted things can't be up-rooted in a moment; and yet, because one ugly weed springs from the seed planted in the chap, you send him off. It took man a good few years to turn thorns into plum-trees, or crabs into sweet apples; but you expect this boy never to show a thorn or a sour fruit. Yet what a lot you'd done already! For your comfort, think of that. Lee Hockin would have burned down our works and let his passion and rage get the better of him and send him to perdition; but Harvey Porter only felt what Lee Hockin would have felt; he didn't do what Lee Hockin would have done. Why not? Because of you, George. He couldn't go back. He'll never go back."

"It's easier to go back than forward, Paul."

"Not to him. You had better stuff to build with than you think. He had good thoughts and a way of looking at things that chimed pretty much with yours—outside morals. He taught me a thing or two—opened the door to ideas. He was going ahead and beginning to feel as well as to see. Through feeling comes salvation, not through seeing, George."

"What does it all amount to, then? What do you and Joanna tell me ought to be done? Am I to go back on the convictions of a lifetime and——?"

Mr. Pitts held up his hand.

"You mustn't ask me that—nor yet ask your daughter. It's out of your character. I should be very sorry to influence you—indeed, I know well that's impossible. You asked my opinion and you asked me to show you exactly how I look at it. And I've done so; but not to influence you—only to oblige you."

"And Joanna?"

"I think the same as Uncle Paul," she answered. "I think he's put it beautifully—as only he could. I couldn't have hit on such a clever way to explain and perhaps, even if I could, it wouldn't have been the way for me to talk to you, father. But I feel just like Uncle Paul."

"And the meaning of that is, that you both reckon it would be no disparagement on my sense of reason and justice to take him back?"

"We don't reckon on anything about what you ought to do, George," answered Mr. Pitts mildly. "We know that you'll do what's right in your eyes, and no living man or woman can quarrel with your high sense of right, or justice either. We only tell you how it looks to us; but neither Joanna nor I are likely to question how it looks to you."

Then Joanna, feeling this to be too temperate, and fearing that Paul's restrained attitude might lose the ground she believed to be gained, spoke once more. She was guarded, but she had never pretended that her interest in Porter was not great, and it did not much surprise Easterbrook that she should champion him so generously.

"Forgive him," she said. "At least, I know

you've done that; but make a sign. Look all round it, dear father. There's so much that seemed serious that time has showed was not serious at all. We all thought—except you—that the darkest side was poor Nelly and her disappointment. Well, that's gone and forgotten, for Nelly has promised to marry Mr. James Masters, and I met them not long since, and she was perfectly happy and as proud as possible. We talked for a long time, and she had actually seen Harvey Porter and he knows that she's engaged to be married."

"I've heard so from her grandfather."

"And how does Todd feel to it?"

"He's as like Luther Crispin as peas in a pod," said Mr. Easterbrook doubtfully. "They've been over there again—Nelly and Wilberforce—and no doubt the two old blades got together and settled it that I was quite mistaken, and that one man's poison is another man's meat; for Porter is doing very well at Erme Clay-Pit, and Crispin says he wouldn't be without him now. But these accidents are on the surface of the thing. Chance has to be thanked for them; they don't touch the principles, or alter the disaster he was responsible for. I've been thinking lately and striving to put virtue and vice in their proper places. My ideas won't suit you, Paul—and yet, perhaps, you'd find no fault with them, for they are on your side in the matter of Harvey Porter. I reckon you can't call that virtue which is merely done at the command of conscience, because conscience only reflects the world's estimate of virtue, and is a thing put into us by our teachers, who may be right or wrong.

The only really virtuous works are done out of in-born virtue."

"That's been argued before your time, George," answered Mr. Pitts, "and since such virtue would come, like the colour of your hair, or eyes, without taking thought, there's no virtue in it."

"But what then?" asked Easterbrook. "Granted no virtue in inborn goodness; then you must allow no vice in inborn badness. So if a man prays, for example, his prayer cannot purify his heart; because only from a pure heart can the pure prayer flow. And, if that's true, how many prayers are pure?"

"That doesn't follow; but we Christians have our sure answer," replied Pitts. "To pray is to open the door of our hearts to Christ: that's how we feel. Prayer isn't only asking for things: prayer's a light set at the window of our poor little souls to show God the way in, and tell Him we are ready and waiting if He'll but deign to come."

"And still it's only the pure heart that can lift a pure prayer," repeated the other, "and in the light of that, I've been thinking on Porter. He didn't pray to my knowledge; but his prayers took the shape of deeds, and seeing his sad limitations and mistaken faith in me, his deeds can be called pure. Pure they are not, we know; but granted the standpoint and the unfinished fabric of the mind from which they came, is it a reasonable thing to——?"

"Have done, George," interrupted Mr. Pitts. "This hair-splitting and word-chopping is nothing

to the purpose. At any rate, nothing to mine. You thresh it out as best you can, if it comforts you and if you think it worth while; but meantime take it from me, as a Christian, that you'll be doing a very right and reasonable thing for once to let yourself follow the inclination of your heart, since your head speaks no clear word against it. Indeed, your head will be backing up your heart before long; I see that. You can't light a pure light with bad oil, and the mingled oils in that boy made the light smoky and foul; but the light came from his heart; and your heart knows it well enough. Help him to burn brighter, then; none can help him like you; because none has a fraction of the influence and power upon him that belong to you. Think upon it. I've spoken enough—too much. My throat's dry and my ears tired of my own voice. Good-night. Good-night."

He took his candle and went to bed, while Joanna put up the cards, for she knew that her father would not finish the game. Then she brought him the glass of weak spirits and water that he always drank before retiring, and spoke of other matters.

He did not return to the subject of Harvey Porter, yet presently said a thing that seemed to include him in its significance, and so sent Joanna to bed excited and happy.

"I've been casting over the annual outing," he began. "The time is in sight for it."

"Shall we drive in wagonettes, as usual?"

"That's the point. We might for a change have one of the big motors that seat fifty, and go farther afield."

"What a splendid thought!" she said; "the men will appreciate that."

"It's their own idea. Godbeer put it to me, and I think Marsland put it to him."

"A feather in Marsland's cap."

"The place is the thing. Woodberry Camp is a fine spot; then, again, you can't beat Dartmoor."

"Let it be Dartmoor—all our best days have been on Dartmoor."

"One might kill two birds with one stone in that case. I'm wanting Uncle Paul and Adam Zachary, and one or two others, to see the Harford Moor works. Would Harford be too far, think you?"

"Not with a motor."

"Then I'll ask Godbeer and Tolley and Lake—they're the holiday committee this year. And if they think that will do, we'll go there."

Thus hope smoothed Joanna's pillow and helped her to sleep happily that night. Immense advances had been made, and she knew enough of her father to believe that he was largely shaken in his former opinions. His mind moved slowly, but it was moving in a direction likely to increase his own ultimate content; that she most surely believed. And it was moving in a direction that must contribute to the happiness of others. She longed to let Porter know that real dawn had broken for him, but hoped he would soon learn it through other channels, because she felt not desirous that he should suppose she was particularly interested.

"He'd think I was concerned for him and not father," she told herself, "whereas, of course, I'm

thinking of father and nobody else. And what is making me feel happy to-night is the thought that father's going to be happy again, not that Harvey is."

CHAPTER XII

“OLD JOHN SPENCE KNOWS FATHER”

THE subtle spirit at Brunel's Tower might have been explained differently from different stand-points. One versed in knowledge of the industrial centres had probably set it down to the physical situation of the pottery; another, accustomed to read character, would doubtless have pointed to the master as prime inspiration for that easy amity, that genial correlation and concord which reigned at the little pottery. A larger synthesis might have gleaned something from yet another angle of examination and found light in the Devon temperament, which is exceedingly tolerant, yet links to that virtue its complement in lack of ambition and an inclination to take things as it finds them. The bulk of West-Country men are content to leave initiative and progress to the restless and the seekers. But of these, indeed, there is no lack.

A just value accorded to each of these forces might have found approximate reason for a state of things so instructive and impressive. Such seemly co-operation sprang doubtless from conditions as far apart at first glance as character and climate. But beautifully they obtained, and where Brunel's Tower now rose in its simple stateliness

from the midst of woodlands, and green meadows shorn of hay; where it stood among lines of dark elms and hedgerows, above the promise of corn-fields that sighed and glimmered to the wind and whitened to harvest, a spirit of cheerful peace reigned; and for the moment two reasons specially contributed thereto. It was observed that Easterbrook grew more patient, that a passing asperity and aloofness, apparent since the spring, had passed away from him; and this was felt to be very good; while a second cause for satisfaction was the approaching annual holiday, to be taken on Dartmoor. The men attributed their satisfaction solely to this latter fact. Most of them had failed to perceive that the master's clouded spirit unconsciously clouded theirs; and that his return to the norm removed a sense of uneasiness drifting invisibly through the works, like the oppression of unwonted electricity in the air.

At six o'clock, on a day that opened suavely and with promise, the company assembled at a rendezvous convenient to the greater number. A motor of huge dimensions grunted leisurely to the tryst, and the company began to climb aboard. Every man and boy wore a carnation, a rose, or a sweet-pea in his buttonhole, and the last thing that Joanna did was to pin a blue viola on her father's grey flannel jacket. She and a few children, sweethearts, and wives, came to see the start, and many waved from doors and windows as the great car proceeded upon its way.

Christopher Ede had brought his concertina; young Bill Godbeer, a formidable mouth-organ; but the first musician was William Godbeer him-

self, who played the cornet and contributed with his music to the pleasure of the way.

“I’m fearing the noise of this great machine will drown your music, William,” said Mr. Pitts; but Godbeer thought not.

The car was full, and half a dozen boys, with the concertina and mouth-organ, sat on the roof and rejoiced at their splendid situation. Two red ensigns flew behind, and on one side of the car the words “*Easterbrook and Pitts*” stared boldly forth, printed in great red letters on a white ground; while on the other, the legend was simply “*Brunel’s Tower*.¹”

They passed the works on the road to Newton presently, and the tower, with no cap of smoke or frill of steam, stood bright and still, mantled with ivy and crowned with red-gold morning light. A cheer rewarded the solitary watchman, for he had hung a flag above the closed gateway and himself stood there to salute the holiday party as it passed. At Kingskerswell, Mr. Coysh, Teddy Palk, Rupert Marsland and a half-dozen others were picked up, and Rupert’s white waistcoat with agate buttons came in for much admirable chaff. Paul Pitts and George Easterbrook sat forward, and on the right and left of Paul were Adam Zachary and Timothy Coysh—one of the most popular men in the works; while the master had Harry Lake, the head packer, another favourite, and Samuel Punchard, for his neighbours. Godbeer occupied the seat by the driver, and it was discovered with satisfaction that he could make his cornet heard. Nor did the car create noise sufficient to drown the voices.

There was not much singing, however, until after breakfast. At Totnes the meal was taken and the hungry party streamed into "The Royal Lion," where two hundred poached eggs and four hundred slices of fried bacon awaited them. Next they enjoyed an hour among the sights of the venerable borough and visited the castle and the river. Then all clambered aloft again; the great motor got under way; Mr. Godbeer woke the echoes with a flourish on his cornet, and smoking and singing began in earnest. The older men smoked pipes, while the younger had supplied themselves with packets of cigarettes. On the roof, hidden from adult eyes, certain lively youngsters also puffed vigorously. Then, without warning, and moved to it, as he declared afterwards, by the sight of an extra-mural cemetery, Christopher began to play the "Dead March" from "Saul" on his concertina. He was promptly stopped and Mr. Easterbrook spoke to Marsland, who on all counts claimed precedence as the first songster of Brunel's Tower.

"Now, Rupert, tune up," he said.

Mr. Marsland feared his voice would hardly carry against the jolt and rumble of the car, and explained that he could not raise it above the proper pitch without possibility of irrevocable injury. He sang a very pathetic song, and one might have observed in the course of the subsequent concert that the younger men still moving in the aura of romance preferred extreme pathos, while their elders, now far advanced into reality, best liked the comic ditties.

Mr. Marsland never sang comic songs, though

he condescended to help the choruses. He told how a sailor lad bade his sweetheart farewell, went forth upon the rolling deep, and died in mid-ocean. But his spirit came to explain her loss to the bereaved and whisper words of hope into the maiden's ear. The narrative was elaborated in endless verses, and the singer won hearty applause for it.

"And now let's have a bit of fun," said Mr. Coysh. "That's a very fine song, Rupert, and you can pretty near hear the splash when the poor boy's dropped overboard. But I've seen the real thing, and this is a beanfeast, so we'll have something to laugh at now. Give us 'Mother-in-law's Party,' Teddy Palk."

Teddy was a comedian, and made the company laugh in a mild way; then Samuel Punchard sang a marshal ditty, to which Godbeer played an accompaniment; Christopher Ede imitated bells on his concertina; Marsland obliged once more with "The Lover and Death," and the concert waxed desultory. Many choruses were sung, but one exercised a permanent joy and was repeated over and over again. Its tune was "So early in the morning"; its intrinsic idiocy never failed to delight the singers, and they shouted it at every village and for the benefit of every passer-by. All rejoiced in it who heard it. Examined critically, the secret of its power and the hidden sources of its humour were alike impossible to detect. For it was no more than the bald statement of a bald fact, and the fact in itself possessed not a shadow of interest or entertainment for any mortal man. Perhaps in this very circumstance, and the futile

ity and fatuity of the assertion, its great charm lay.

This was the whole song:

“Old John Spence knows father;
Old John Spence knows father;
Old John Spence knows father;
And father knows John Spence.”

The chorus never palled. From time to time it ceased and was neglected for half an hour, while more mirthful and tuneful numbers occupied the holiday party; but ever and anon they returned to it with gusto. They entered Harford at noon to the peal of “Old John Spence,” while Mr. Godbeer was busy with a waltz on his cornet.

A great room at “The Green Man” had been prepared, and about one o’clock, dinner began. Mr. Easterbrook took the head of the table, and Mr. Paul Pitts sat at the foot. There were two guests, for Luther Crispin and his partner joined the company and sat one on each side of their host. Great joints of beef and mutton were served, with peas and potatoes, beans and cabbage. Beer flowed; but not a few of the men drank no alcohol. They had lemonade, and the boys drank ginger-beer. Fruit tarts followed, with abundance of cream and sugar.

In the course of the meal, Anthony Fincher, who sat on Mr. Easterbrook’s left, struck up a friendship with Jeremiah Tolley, who sat on Anthony’s left; and Tolley, who had no will to a lengthy tramp after dinner, promised to come and see Fincher’s poultry. Both were fanciers and interested each other.

The master spoke to Mr. Crispin and heard about Harvey Porter.

"If it's a sore subject, say so," said Luther. "I don't want to mention anybody to spoil your outing, George; but I'd like to tell a word or two about him."

"And welcome, Luther. I should have asked you how he was going on, for that matter."

"Well, he is going on, and that's the very word for it. He is going on so fast that in a year's time he'll have to go altogether."

Easterbrook frowned, and Mr. Crispin continued:

"I don't mean nothing like that. He's a young man, not an angel, and if you've ever struck on a young man without a fault, then you're luckier than I've been. He's wilful here and there, and he's terribly fond of his own way, and the mischief is that his own way's often got a lot in its favour."

"You say that?"

"I do—in little things—clever contrivances and ingenious tips for saving time and such like. He's got the mind of an engineer, in my opinion—a mechanical order of mind—and takes to machines like I take to children, and Fincher does to trouble. And when I say he's got to go from Erme Clay-Pit, I mean for his own profit, not for mine. In fact, as an honest man, I couldn't well keep him after he's turned of age. It wouldn't be fair. He ought to do great things—greater things than ever he'll have the chance to do here."

"Is he honourable and straight in all his dealings, Luther?"

Mr. Crispin reflected.

"Yes," he answered, "he is. You must judge him in rather a larger spirit than you'd judge Dick, Tom, and Harry; but I can say with sober truth he's straight, as you and I understand the word. I grant you straightness puzzles him and he never sucked it in with his mother's milk. But he's very understanding and he's coming to see that he must be straight, not only for convenience, but because a prosperous and useful career demands it. In a word, he's being straight for his own sake at present, and presently he'll be straight for the sake of his fellow-creatures and the world in general. It's a peculiar case. He's a bit heartless in certain directions; but he makes up for being indifferent and rather callous where he's not interested, by being a proper delight where he is. I can't tell what it is about him. 'Tis a thing a girl oft has, but seldom a boy—a sort of charm—something to make you like the creature, and want him about you, and miss him when he's not there."

"I know."

"Well, I've asked myself what it lies in and I've talked upon it with Fincher's wife—a very clever woman and rather thrown away on Anthony, between you and me—though he don't think so. She says straight out that his father was a gentleman. Not that she has any great admiration for gentlemen in general, for they're selfish and lazy, and too prone to pleasure and too set on getting their own way; and Porter's all that, except lazy, which he never will be. But along with those common class failings there goes something—

something we haven't got and never can have, and what the name of it is I don't know; but you see it in 'em—you'll see it in a boy of ten, or an old man of ninety. It isn't brains, for they're often far bigger fools than us; and it isn't education, for the public schools they go to only teach games, I'm told, and fuss about their hat-ribbons and coat-tails and suchlike little babyish fooleries. In fact, they've got a good deal to fight against in the station of life where it pleases God to call them; but there's the something, and it will out, and men like you and me are ready to grant it; but the socialists hate it and curse it one minute, and pretend there's no such thing the next. And what is it?"

"Tradition, Luther: the tradition that flows through 'em and is handed on from generation to generation. It's gall to the people who want all the power nowadays, and it makes 'em restive and uneasy and suspicious. And if they rose against the upper folk again, as they did in France, and threw 'em down and chopped their heads off by the thousand, the upper people would die game, as they did then, and take their secret with them. It's far beyond the reach of the masses; and just for that reason the masses fret about it and hate the classes. I grant it's a useless secret enough, and don't help the hard world forward much—yet there it is; and because they can never know it, or feel what it is like to be gentlefolk, the socialists hate them, and are full of scorn and bitterness against them, and cry out that the only man who's any sort of good must have come from behind a plough, or a counter.

If you were born in the gutter, you're all right; but if you were born in a castle, you're all wrong, and it's no use for those that come of long descent to declare liberal principles. The people won't believe 'em—naturally; for no man's up against his own class whatever he pretends. The blood in his veins shouts against it; and so does the sight of his first-born son."

"True, though your cherry-tart's going cold. But I wouldn't say that tradition's the word," answered Mr. Crispin. "'Tis deeper than that—a thing not handed down by word of mouth, or example, as tradition is. It isn't the sense of obligation put into the sons of the upper people by their parents and guardians; it's just a thing that runs through the channels of the blood, like the migratory instincts of birds. In fact, instinct I judge to be the word for it. You take a cuckoo—she drops her egg in another bird's nest and never gives her young another thought. There's no tradition there, and the young cuckoo ain't told by his foster-parent that he's a migratory fowl. No; but none the less, when the time comes, that motherless, fatherless young creature spreads his slow wing, sets his beak to the south, and goes to his inheritance of winter sunshine, though nobody ever read the will of his Maker to him, or showed him the way. And so it is with Porter. He may have funny ideas and he may want a lot of patience and weeding, for birth's no safeguard against wrong opinions or vice, or wickedness in every form; but he's got his inheritance, all right; despise it or not, as you please; and it makes him wonderful courteous, and strangely thoughtful

and considerate for the weak, and much alive to what the young owe the old. Things he does we see are good to do; but we should never have thought of them."

The other nodded but did not reply.

"His future will be interesting," continued Mr. Crispin. "I suppose you don't feel enough interest in it to talk about it?"

"I——" began the other; then he caught a signal from Mr. Paul Pitts. The dinner was done and the time had come for the brief speeches of mutual compliment and congratulation that always concluded it.

Mr. Punchard toasted the partners, and all sang "For they are jolly good fellows"; then Mr. Easterbrook declared his gratification at the events of the day and the pleasure he enjoyed in the society of his friends and fellow-workers. He proposed the staff, and he and Mr. Pitts drank the health of all assembled. Mr. Lake was then praised by Mr. Pitts for his conduct of the outing, and all drank to Mr. Lake and the committee. As an addition the master then proposed the visitors, and Luther Crispin replied for himself and Anthony Fincher. He woke laughter and brightened the end of the feast.

The weather had changed when they returned to the open air, and there was a threat of storm. Mr. Fincher foretold thunder and lightning, while Mr. Crispin could not deny the possibility. The sun, at any rate, still shone at Harford, though aloft on Harford Moor a thin fog-bank rolled under the crown of the hill.

Thither, however, climbed George Easterbrook

and his partner, with Punchard and Zachary. Half a dozen men accepted Mr. Crispin's invitation to see the works beside Erme; others were contented to go a hundred yards into the Moor and recline at the first comfortable spot among the heath and fern; while others, linking themselves arm in arm, tramped together along the little street and over the village green. They commanded an admiring and delighted audience, chaffed the giggling girls in the windows, uttered wild and weird sounds, and rejoiced Harford with "Old John Spence."

CHAPTER XIII

"AND FATHER KNOWS JOHN SPENCE"

TIMOTHY COYSH, William Godbeer, and Christopher Ede accompanied Mr. Crispin to the clay-pit. Teddy Palk came, too, and Rupert Marsland also started; but he feared the sky, and turned back at half a mile. There was a threat aloft, and Rupert dreaded getting wet, because once he had done so and fallen ill afterwards.

William Godbeer came hither for a private purpose. He felt no particular interest in Erme Clay-Pit, but much concerning one who worked there.

"We shall get a sight of young Harvey Porter," he said to Christopher Ede, "and that's why I'm coming."

"He'll know we are here, and be greatly excited, I expect," answered Rupert, who overheard. "I don't think I shall speak to him. He's out of it now. I did the best I could for him at the works, as we all did; but it was no good. He's Mrs. Johns over again, you may say—not to be lifted out of himself even by higher natures than his own."

"You gave him a lot of useful advice, I'm sure," said Mr. Crispin, who walked with the young men.

"I did. I wasn't sparing; but it didn't do no good."

"It did you good, I'm sure. That's a fine thing about advice: it always comforts the giver something wonderful," said Luther, without a smile.

Mr. Marsland regarded the speaker doubtfully, and William Godbeer laughed. Then the handler and painter decided to turn back.

"I haven't fetched my mackintosh coat," he explained, "and if the sky means anything, we shall have a proper downpour, and nothing to shelter you; so I'll go back and keep within reach of cover. If I get a cold——"

"There's Harvey," said Mr. Crispin, pointing to a figure among others busy at the sluices where the liquid clay poured down into the drying-chamber. "You shout, one of you chaps. No doubt he'll know your voices."

"Harvey Porter!" bawled Christopher. "Harvey Porter! 'Tis Christopher Ede!"

Rupert Marsland retraced his way, but not before he heard Porter shout:

"How's yourself, Chris?"

Then Harvey came running.

He shook hands with them all, and Luther Crispin directed him to show them round the works.

"A poor show after Brunel's Tower," he said; "but they wanted to see the pits—or else, perhaps, it was you they wanted to see."

"Both," declared Godbeer, shaking Harvey's hand. The others also greeted him with friendship.

"I've got a message from Mrs. Tolley to say she hardly knows what's in the newspapers nowadays," said Teddy Palk. "I lodge along with them since you've gone. And Jeremiah was com-

ing to see you, but he's off to look at some poultry instead."

"Come to the machinery, Ted; it will interest you a lot," answered Harvey. "And tell Mrs. Tolley I never liked anything better than reading the newspaper out loud of an evening to her. And I'd start on it again to-morrow if I could. Where I am now, Mrs. Fincher, who's kindness alive to me, just like Mrs. Tolley used to be, always wants to know the news. But Mr. Fincher says that news is mostly bad, and that there's quite enough bad news in the open street every twenty-four hours without paying a penny each morning to buy it. That's what Mr. Fincher says. But Mrs. Fincher likes to hear what's going on outside Harford, though she wishes Harford was mentioned oftener."

"My clay-pit's the making of Harford," declared Mr. Crispin; "without it, I do assure you, we should be like a dead man out of mind. In fact, it's only a death ever gets us into the papers at all. Now you show 'em round, my son, and then bring 'em in the office to have a spot of whisky with me before they go back."

Porter obeyed, spoke to each of the little company, asked many questions, and did not hesitate to declare his longing.

"I'd give all I've got in the world to be back with you men," he declared. "No doubt you've heard all about it, and no doubt you think I'm a terror to have done any such thing; but you must keep in mind why I did it. However, it won't make no difference now. And yet——"

"It shook up Mr. Easterbrook a good bit," said

Christopher Ede. "It can't be denied. Of course he was always death on you, and a very good friend to you."

"He showed it, and I knew it," answered Porter, "and to think of the likes of him being so friendly to the likes of me—of course, it was only in human nature I should want to pay him back. If he could only have squinted at the thing from the same point as me. But Mr. Crispin—he's a wonder, and clever as well as witty—he talked to the master, and said that he believed that I might yet——"

"Why don't you have a dash at him?" asked Teddy Palk. "It's a free country, and no harm could come of it."

"Supposing I spoiled all? Supposing he was coming round very gradual, and I went before him, as you say, Ted, and just upset everything?"

"You might very likely do that," declared Christopher Ede. "We all know how Mr. Easterbrook chews over a thing. When he decides, he decides; but this has been a fair puzzler for him from the first, and I doubt if he's over it yet."

They tramped along together discussing this theme.

"You see you didn't do yourself no good by sending that cheeky message through Punchard," explained Teddy Palk. "No man would have swallowed that. It was a lot too patronizing."

"Patronizing!" cried Harvey. "How could I patronize him, any more than a daddy-long-legs could patronize God Almighty! It wasn't spoken like that. I only wanted to show what I might have done if I'd been a bad lot; but, instead,

though he'd chucked me, I still felt I'd sooner serve him than anybody in the world."

"Well, I don't know. I should have felt like him," declared Palk. "What do you say, William?"

As yet Mr. Godbeer had said very little indeed.

"I'll have a talk with Porter presently," he answered. "For the minute he's supposed to be showing us the clay-works, so we'd better let him do it, and keep our mouths shut till we've heard all he can tell us."

They inspected the works, then tramped the margin of the green lake. Teddy began flinging stones into the water. Mr. Coysh rested on a nitch of reeds that stood there waiting with others for a cart to draw them away, and Christopher Ede picked blackberries, where brambles flourished on the clay-mounds.

Then Godbeer spoke with Porter, and urged him earnestly to make an effort to see Mr. Easterbrook.

"You did wrong, and you're the youngest, and it stands to reason the first step must come from you. Knowing you, I dare say he actually expects it. You'll never have such an opportunity again, very likely. I can't think why you hesitate. You don't expect him to come here and see you?"

"Good Lord, no! My only feeling is that if I risk it and go up over to him, I may wreck everything. Perhaps his mind is in just that ticklish state to me that if he saw me to-day, it might finally decide him against me."

"I say go all the same," repeated Godbeer. "If the worst happens, he can only refuse to see

you, and order you away. But that won't happen. He's in a very kindly mood to-day. I watched him while we came along. He spoke little, but his face was set fair, and he often laughed at the songs and fun. Where's he gone exactly?"

Porter indicated the position of the new enterprise.

"I saw him. I watched him a long time," he explained. "I know exactly where he's gone. I was all over the works up there only last Sunday. And Zachary and Mr. Pitts and Punchard went also. I dare say you wouldn't have spotted them so far off, but your eyes get amazing keen if you live up here, and see for miles and miles away. And I hope you feel friendly, Godbeer?"

"I'm glad to see you again, and I should be glad to see you back, Harvey, and perhaps some day I shall. Now show us the way to Mr. Crispin's office, please, and then you climb up there and walk straight to him, and cap to him, and bid him 'Good-afternoon.' Then leave it to the others. You may count on Mr. Pitts being kind, but not Punchard. I may tell you frankly that Sam's never forgiven you for the fright you gave him."

Harvey laughed.

"That's no odds. Have you brought your cornet, William?"

"Yes. It don't sound so well in a motor as behind four horses, all the same," confessed Mr. Godbeer.

"I'll be home this evening to see the start," said Harvey. "I've long been wishful to hear you play."

"Where is your home?"

"I live with the Finchers—Mr. Crispin's partner. His wife's a very nice woman. Her grown-up girl, Mary, keeps house for Mr. Crispin."

"Well, climb the hill, and good luck! It looks as if it might pour with rain before we get home."

"It's always raining in this God-forsaken place," declared Porter. "We have tons and tons of rain, while not a drop falls down below—in what they call the 'in-country.' I'll see you again, William, please, and I thank you gratefully for being so friendly to me. The sight of you has meant a lot to me. You came next after them—Mr. Easterbrook and Mr. Pitts, I mean."

He indicated the building that was Mr. Crispin's private office, and then set off and breasted the great hill swiftly. In his heart was no fear, but much nervousness and excitation. To think that within half an hour he must stand face to face with the master made him shake with an emotion that took other physical shape also, and sent the blood with a rush to his face. Not the hill, but the thought of the man who walked on top of it, made his heart beat, and caused him to take deep breaths of air for relief.

The sky grew strange, and scarcely a grass-blade moved at earth-level, but overhead there was motion of vapour. From far up the valley, beneath the heavy darkness that shrouded it, came a strange sound—"the calling of the cleeves." Porter knew that it foretold a change of weather. Before him whips of cloud, like quivering thongs, flew up over the head of the hill. The sun, now westering, grew sickly, choked with translucent

and fulvous vapours. They robbed the earth beneath them of light and heat, and banished all detail from the distance. Forests and meadows, and the wide-wayed valleys to south and west, sulked in one great welter of purple. The clouds massed and herded as though at a muster; but the storm-centre was off the Moor, and tended to the south-east. Aloft, low ridges of grey mist hurried along the side of the hills, and the wind wakened again and whimpered fitfully. Between its silences, the river, far below him now, sang a new song, and the cleeves still called. An air of watchfulness haunted the waste. The weather had wholly changed in an hour, as often it will in these high places, and before the young man could ascend another mile, the mist was upon him, brushing his hot cheek with its cool fingers. Far away a knotted ribbon of lightning fell upon the sooty distance.

A moment later, and Harvey met three men; but Mr. Easterbrook was not one of them. Zachary, Paul Pitts, and Samuel Punchard approached. Thunder, sunk to a mere murmuring by distance, reached his ears at the same time as their voices.

All shook hands with him, and all were kindly.

" 'Tis a funny, savage sort of place you live in now, and you being a savage sort of youth, no doubt it suits you very well," said Samuel. But Porter denied it.

"Oh no, it don't, Mr. Punchard. Savage enough it may be, but I'm not—no more savage than a sheep-dog."

"Talk while we step along," said Adam Zach-

ary. "There's a drowning before us unless we have luck."

"The worst is in the valley: but a thunderstorm goes round in a ring," explained Porter; "so it may come here yet."

"It's coming," answered Adam—"it's coming fast."

Porter turned to Mr. Pitts.

"I was daring to run up to see Mr. Easterbrook—just for a second—no more, of course. Do you think I might do it, sir, or is it out of the question?"

"I'm glad you thought upon it, and there's no harm done," answered Paul. "He'd be very glad to see you—yes, glad. The word's not too strong. There'll be a light train down in half an hour, and he's a bit weary, and means to wait for it. It will land him near the Moor gate within a mile of Hartford village. He's on the line, walking over it. We've looked at the clay-cuttings. And if Mr. Easterbrook should ask you to come back as far as the village with him, I hope you'll do so."

A nearer flash of lightning fell in a double streamer, diamond bright, ten miles away, and the thunder followed it more noisily than before. Zachary was already going down the hill at a jog trot, and Mr. Punchard seemed in doubt whether to return or proceed. He asked Porter.

"You're half-way, as near as can be, Samuel, and if you go back it's up-hill; but if you go on, it's down, so you'd best to run on. You may find yourself down under it before it gets worse."

Mr. Punchard and Mr. Pitts accordingly proceeded.

"We shall see you again," said the latter. "In fact, I'll ask you to the tea presently as my guest; and I hope nothing's going to happen up the hill to make it impossible for you to come."

In great joy Harvey declared his thanks; then they separated, and Porter pressed onwards, while the others followed Adam Zachary, who was already far ahead.

Trembling now with excitement, and regardless of the dark garment of the thunderstorm that trailed swiftly across the sky from Ugborough Moor, Porter pushed forward up the hill, crossed a clay-drain wherein the liquid clay ran down from the moor to the valley beneath, and presently reached the railway which ran between Sharp Tor and Three Barrows—a height crowned with triple cairns. Here ran a length of double line where the trains passed each other, and a shed of corrugated iron stood beside the railway.

No sign of living being marked the place. A few carrion crows croaked uneasily before the storm, and under the gathering darkness the line, which ran on rubble from the clay-quarries aloft, stared stark, like a thread of wool drawn zigzag through the gloom of the heath. Now the storm swept down from the north, and the lightning fell on Three Barrows.

Porter looked round about, and knew that the master must be in the little iron house. He walked before it and looked in, to see Easterbrook sitting there with his arms crossed. He was gazing upon the ground, and appeared to be deep in thought. Harvey approached with a pale face and beating

heart. As Easterbrook lifted up his eyes, the younger touched his hat.

"Good-afternoon, sir—at least, not a very good afternoon, I'm afraid."

"You! And how are you?"

"I'm very well indeed, sir, and I hope you are."

George regarded him; then he lifted his arm.

"Shake hands. You've lived and you've learned since—since I sent you about your business."

Harvey obeyed, and his eyes glowed.

"I'd have walked ten thousand miles for that," he said. "And I have lived and learned, please, sir. And I shan't forget what I've learned, neither."

"You're on the thin side, seemingly."

"I shall get fat, I reckon, after to-day."

The rain began to fall in earnest.

"Best stop here for a bit. The train's not due down yet," said Easterbrook. "And as for learning, I've learned a thing or two also since I saw the last of you."

"I'm sure there's not much in the world for you to learn, master."

"I've learned this, and you're clever enough to understand it, perhaps. I've learned to strike a better average among men, and not separate them so widely in my mind. We make too great distinctions, but the larger the outlook, the less there is to choose between man and man—or between nation and nation. We've been crying out with horror at the Bulgarians and Greeks lately—Christian people playing catchball with babies on bayonets, and crucifying women

and children. It sounds pretty bad for Europeans in the twentieth century. Yet, where's the great difference between the nations that commit these infamies, and the nations that are strong enough to stop them and don't? The Great Powers, so to call them, could stay the trouble in a week. Why don't they? Because they hold personal considerations of fear and friendship among themselves as a thousand times more vital to the world's welfare than the torture of babies and crucifixion of mothers. So we mustn't vaunt ourselves and say, 'Thank God we're not as Bulgaria!' There's really nothing in it. They slaughter the helpless women and children, and we entertain their representatives in this country with every honour. And it's the same with individuals. We are no more than little waves in the eternal ebb and flow of life, and the ocean of it is so huge that there's no real difference between the greatest and the least of the waves, seen with an understanding mind. The great and small come to the same journey's end, and vanish on the same beach of eternity; and the roar and splutter of the greatest wave that breaks is only less quickly forgot than the tinkle of the least. D'you understand that—that there's no real difference in the long run between the greatest and the smallest of us? Do you understand that the best or worst a man can do is soon overturned, and swept away, and forgotten by those that come after, like to-morrow's toll of waves will sweep away the work of to-day's?"

"I understand a bit. But it's hard to think of

serious things, master—standing here and hearing you talking."

He could not hide his joy nor take his eyes from Easterbrook's face.

The hail rattled so loudly on the corrugated iron roof of the shed that it drowned the noise of the thunder.

"It's only a scat," said Harvey. "We've had storms like this before this summer. The wonder is nobody's been struck up here. Five sheep were killed not a mile off last June."

The other came unconsciously under the old magic of Porter's voice. There was a fascinating tone in it for Easterbrook.

"Tell me how it is with you," he said. "I've a good report from Mr. Crispin."

"He's wonderful kind, master. And he's like you say you are, I reckon, and can't draw a very great line between men. He's easy and friendly with me, and treats everybody much the same; and the younger you are, the better he treats you. He don't much like the company of other old people. He says they cast him down, because they all pretend they're ready for death, and he knows very well 'tis humbug, and they're not in the least. And people in their prime he won't neighbour with neither, because he says an old man never looks a bigger fool than when he's trying to talk young and bustle about, and be in with those at their best. So he leaves them alone, and they leave him alone. And that only leaves the children; and whether it's true, or only pretence, I can't say, but he declares that he gets more sense and clear sight out of children than anybody turned twenty.

He says that if he wants to know how he's looking, he always asks a child."

Mr. Easterbrook kept silence. But he watched Harvey, and his heart grew peaceful.

"Go on talking," he said. "Anything—just talk to me. I want to hear you talk."

His conscience appeased, and his own outlook honestly enlarged, he was in a case to be happy. He believed that little now stood between him and the youth. He felt for him as a father to a son. He longed for him once more at Brunel's Tower. He desired Porter to be back again in his own life, and he knew that the young man must bulk larger and larger there as time went on. Easterbrook did not really listen to him, while Harvey, with a glad heart, spoke of Luther Crispin and Anthony Fincher's children. He pursued his own thoughts, and suffered the other's voice to accompany them. A great wave of emotion touched the master—an emotion that only such men may feel when middle-age is passed and life has mellowed nature to its ripeness. He could not conceal his heart wholly, and he smiled upon the youth. Then he rose from where he sat, stood by the other, put his hands on his shoulders, and looked into his eyes.

"Will you come back to me, young Harvey?" he said.

"Master!"

"I want you back. I care about you. You've learned my way; and I've seen yours. And my way's best."

"I know that."

"But I was wrong, too. Wrong in this: that I

didn't let your reasons have their proper weight. And so I did the very thing you had done—evil that good might come. Boy, I want your good more than most things; and you wanted mine."

"More than anything in the world, master, and always shall for ever."

"You'll come back to us?"

"Will I come back to life?"

The thunder roared over their heads now, and the din drowned their voices. But upon Porter the fury of the storm was lost, for the weather of his mind made the moment unutterable and splendid.

"It was worth it all to hear I may come back," he said. "There'll never be such another moment in my life for me. 'Tis almost too much. I doubt it's true. I'll wake up and find I've been dreaming, I reckon."

"The white earth it is that will be a dream, when you come back to the red. Set forth. The train's held up for the storm. I'll wait no longer. I must be tramping, and they can soon dry my coat at 'The Green Man.' I'm glad you came to me."

They went out to their destiny with full hearts. The elder man was happy; the younger, almost beside himself with joy.

"I could shout it aloud that I'm coming back to Brunel's Tower. And I shall shout it to-night, master! I'd burst if I held it in."

"Perhaps Crispin and Fincher won't part with you."

Three forces now converged suddenly in the passing of a few instants. Two were human and

one mechanical, and subject only to human control within physical limits. These played the scene, while overhead rattled thunder and flashed lightning. But the mightier powers, the deafening, harmless thunder it was, and not the lightning, that precipitated the event.

The railway ran past the shed, and George Easterbrook stepped out upon it with his eyes up the line whence the locomotive and trucks would come. As he did so, an up-train that had just arrived bore down upon him. Its noise was entirely muffled by a peal from above. But Porter, following, saw the train five yards from the master, and leapt forward with a swift bound, shouting as he did so. His charge carried Easterbrook clear of the line, but not of the engine. He was just touched and thrown aside; but the right front wheel of the engine passed over Porter's right arm and the buffer struck his head as he fell.

The little train was pulling up at the time, and it stopped five seconds after the accident.

In ten minutes the engine, loosed from its trucks, carried both wounded men down the line again to the nearest point for Harford. Porter was unconscious; Easterbrook's collar-bone was broken, but he had suffered no vital hurt. Two men who had come with the engine descended with it; and now they carried Porter to Harford, and Easterbrook walked beside them. The journey was a short mile, and they soon arrived. Then the engine-driver, returning, hastened down the hill again to the main line and despatched telegrams, already worded for them by George Easterbrook, to Ivybridge and Plymouth.

At "The Green Man" the holiday tea was being prepared, and all hands, crowding in from the storm, were ready for it.

The storm itself had passed and a cool, fresh wind arose from the east, while a sky of silvery cirri gave place to the blue again.

Easterbrook issued directions to Mr. Punchard and others.

"He's terribly knocked about; but we must hope he's going to live. He can't die now. He saved my life. I'll tell Mr. Pitts about it, and he'll tell you all after tea. Sit down to the meal and be merry. Don't let any man be troubled. He can't die now. I feel it so. There's nothing amiss with me that won't quickly be put right, and young Porter will live. Tell them that. He will certainly live."

But the tea was taken very quietly, for none could be merry within a few yards of the unconscious man. To the Finchers he had been conveyed, and Mrs. Fincher was doing what she could. Two doctors came presently and operated on Harvey Porter. Mr. Easterbrook's collarbone was set and a nurse sent for.

Before the great car departed for home, George Easterbrook spoke a few words to the company.

"I'm all right; but I'm stopping here for the present. Young Harvey's not recovered consciousness yet; but he may do any minute. Keep it up and be gay. Remember he saved my life, and I'll be bold to think you're all glad of that. You'll have a proper run home by moonlight, I hope. Good luck, all. I'm sorry the day's been marred in this fashion; but life's life."

He had given Mr. Pitts private instructions to send up Joanna to Cornwood as quickly as she could come.

The car passed away into the dusk, and the men talked. They were quiet at first, but grew noisier as the miles began to stretch between them and Harford.

"'Tis a holiday after all, and terrible things happen every day," said Christopher Ede.

"He told us to be merry," ventured Billy Godbeer, "and father's going to play his cornet when we get to Ivybridge."

"Why not?" asked Rupert Marsland. "A holiday is a holiday, and should be treated accordingly. It wasn't our fault the thing fell out."

"And he told us to be merry," repeated young Godbeer.

The lights of Ivybridge began to glimmer ahead, and the invigorating blast of the cornet sounded. They stopped for some fun and drinking. Christopher played his concertina to an admiring crowd of residents, and some of the boys bought little trumpets. Only Godbeer's heart was low behind his cornet as they set off again, and Paul Pitts kept silence and longed for the endless journey to finish. He thought upon the changes and chances of life, and considered the escape of his partner from death. But everybody else was in rare good humour by this time, and sang and shouted ceaselessly.

They gave Brunel's Tower three cheers as they rolled by it. The roads were white and dusty, for there had been no rain here. The tower rose silver-grey and shapely in the moonlight; and

round about swelled the meadows and heaved the low hills, very black under their leaf-clad timber.

Under the silence of night the holiday-makers might have been heard returning at a mile distant.

Still they sang their famous song:

**"Old John Spence knows father;
Old John Spence knows father;
Old John Spence knows father;
And father knows John Spence."**

CHAPTER XIV

JOANNA TO PAUL

Two days later, Paul Pitts received a letter from Joanna Easterbrook. She wrote from Harford, where she had been stopping with her father.

"DEAR UNCLE PAUL,

"It is all over now. He died just before it was light this morning. He did not recover consciousness for one moment. It has been so fearful waiting and hoping, and it is so fearful now. But only for us now. To save father was the last thing he did and the last thing he remembered. I hope he knew he had succeeded. I have not time to be sorry for myself. Father held his hand hour after hour and stroked it. He is terribly sad, and I hope you'll come to him. He is going to bring Harvey back so that he can be buried in our little bit of the cemetery. It is cruel and horrible and hateful to think he has gone for ever and ever.

"But we are to be pitied more than Harvey; because he died in the moment of his greatest happiness, with all the future clear and bright and hopeful for him. And it is a beautiful end for anybody to let their death show what a splendid thing a man can be. I remember you said once, 'The head may win this world, but the heart wins the next.' And if there is a next, then Harvey's heart has won it; and so we must not cry over

him. But I've cried a great many tears all the same—for father and for myself. I cared for him so much. I was so proud of him and I longed to see him again. And I did see him for that matter; but it wasn't him. He was gone long before he died, and I never felt he was there, even while I sat beside him. To be with him here was like going to a silent, empty house, that you have once known full of happy people.

"Father is crushed, and that is why I ask you to come to me. I can't bear it.

"There is to be an inquest to-morrow.

"We must try and make it up to father as well as we can. He blames himself secretly, but, of course, there is no reason why he should do that. Only now do I see what Harvey was to father and what he would have been. It seems to have aged father by ten years. His shoulder is going on all right and he thinks nothing of it.

"Come if you can to-day, for father's sake. Mr. Crispin is very much upset, for he turns out to have been very fond of Harvey. And Mrs. Fincher greatly cared for him, too, and her sons. She came in to see him to-day, and cried very bitterly.

"It has all been a sort of nightmare, and I feel the only peaceful thing in this little storm of sorrow is dear Harvey. Why are people frightened of the dead, I wonder? He looks so puzzled to me—as if he was wondering why he was ever born.

"Come, please, dear Uncle Paul.

"Your loving

"JOANNA."

Mr. Pitts had just wound the greater of his two dragons round the pot and was putting in the feathers of its wings. He sighed, read the letter a second time, then stopped his work, washed his hands, and went to Samuel Punchard.

"Tell them," he said, "that I shan't be here to-morrow. Zachary can open the letters. The poor young chap is dead."

"Well, well. Perhaps it is a good thing, seeing how he was smashed. I'm sorry. Did he come to again?"

"No."

"That's a providence, anyhow. Because it would only have been to know what he'd lost and make the end harder. Besides the pain of dying. Well, he's out of it and I reckon the master's a good bit vexed."

"He's feeling it very much—so Joanna writes."

"Bound to do so—seeing it was all his fault. He chuck's the chap, and the chap saves his life, and the chap dies. Knowing master, you may be sure he wishes it had been different."

Samuel stoked the fires, and they roared and cast fort their rosy, golden light on the faces of Paul Pitts and the furnace-man.

"The awful thought that it's too late for ever," said Punchard. "I know the feeling myself; who don't for that matter? The feeling that it's too late is always bad. There's cold misery in being too late for a death-bed, or even a railway-train. To be too late is a sad experience."

"You're right, Sam. And the keener you feel, the more it behoves you to be patient with all men, while it's not too late. For life is doubtful

at best, and the very beggar you lecture may die a minute later. When a man goes through the door of death, Samuel, it may mean something far worse than death to those left behind him."

"Yet who shall say the master erred at any point, or did one thing or thought one thought to be called unjust?" asked Mr. Punchard.

"None can say it; none can call my partner in question, or judge him," answered Paul; "but he's judging himself, and his own conscience is a harder tribunal to the likes of him than heaven itself will be."

"A very good-natured boy—though queer—was Porter, and gone off in a blaze of glory, I'm sure. Had better luck, you might say, than he deserved, for it's the last thing he did that will be remembered about him, and that's the best. So, through his wrong-doing, he was put into the way of a bit of right-doing; and after being a rascal he swells up into a hero. And all inside four months! Now that's a bit out of the usual—eh?"

"Why, no, Samuel—an everyday thing, I reckon, and well inside the pattern of human nature. Men are like pots, Sam—none perfect, if you look close enough, for perfection is denied all made of earth. But millions of men and pots are perfect enough to fulfil their purpose and do fine work and be beautiful, or useful, or both. Our blemishes need not spoil us, and though, speaking as a Christian, we're all damaged goods by the nature of things; yet none is worthless, and a faulty piece may often be lifted to a very noble purpose."

THE END

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